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White

and
Black

W. W. PHELSON



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Walter Wright.

To

W^m M. Fly

On his 43rd Birthday
From his wife with the
earnest desire that he may
celebrate many more such
days -

Dec 26th - 1900

IN WHITE AND BLACK

A S T O R Y

BY

W. W. PINSON

*"In all the crowded universe,
There is but one stupendous word;
And huge and rough or trimmed
and terse,
Its fragments build and undergird
The songs and stories we rehearse."*

—HOLLAND.

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IN WHITE AND BLACK.

CHAPTER I.

THE EAVESDROPPERS.

"I 'clar to gracious, Mammie, ef you ain't gittin' as onsufferable keerless as us young niggers."

The heap of dozing complacency in the kitchen corner straightened into life with the tart reply: "G'long wid yo' black kyarcus, I wa'nt 'sleep."

"Nobody sed you wuz; you's kickin' fo' you's spurred. But ef you wa'nt sleepin' you shore 'have lack you wuz. You 'mind me o' ole Unc' Zeke fishin' fer perch when they bitin' right good. 'Sides you done let de water bile ober an' mos' put de fire clean out."

"You thinkin' you's monstous peart a-sassin' yo' own Mammie what dun brung you up an' nuss you when you

can't do nothin' fur yo'self. I spec' you done an' furgot all dat. Buck niggers lack you mos' ingin'ly do furgit. I spar'd too many dem hick'ries fur you to be 'spec'ful. 'Sides, hunny, I ain't bleeg'd to hurry, case de white folks gwine be late 'count er bein' kep' up by de party las' night."

"Den whut I's spilin' to know is whut mek you hustle me up so soon to mek de fire in de big house, den when I come here I fin' you snoozin' in de corner, jes same as a oberseer uv a rainy day. I's pow'ful feerd you's gittin' triflin' sence you got sot free."

"Git out wid yo' long tongue. I done an' tole you dat tongue gwine git you in trouble. Yo' mouf's de biggest part o' you, 'ceptin' it's yo' foot, an' when it ain't full o' vittles it's allus full o' nonsensiful gabble."

This conversation between Ben and his mother, whom we shall come to know as Aunt Lylie, as she was universally called by the white folks, was in the best of humor. The fact is, she never felt prouder of her strap-

ping boy, now standing on the verge of manhood, than when he was trying to hold his own with her in some such battle of words; nor was she ever quite so much to his liking as when she was pouring forth a torrent of mock abuse on him, for then it was he knew her heart was warm toward him.

At this point Ben dropped his voice to a confidential tone, and said: "Mammie, I's gwine to tell you whut I seed las' night when I wuz comin' roun' by de big po'ch arter I dun carr'd de dishes fur de tables. Jes as I come roun' de corner Miss Dora she come down the steps, and Mars Lawrence he come up de walk, an' dey met right onder de big beech, dat 'pear to hole up its han's to shiel' um fum de light, an'—"

"G'long wid you, an' doan come makin' up no tales," broke in Aunt Lylie.

"Sho's ole Sookey Brown's a witch, I's tellin' you de Lawd's truf, Mammie; but den I spec' you's gittin' too old to keer 'bout sich nonsense as co'tin'." Here Ben began to whistle

and turned as if to go out. All the time he knew full well he could not get out of that room without telling his story to the end. Aunt Lylie contrived to get between him and the door.

"Who's gittin' ole? 'Sides, what's dat you been dreamin'? I spec' you eat too much er dat cake, you cyar'd roun' so gran' wid yo' head rar'd back same as a devil hoss when he's mad. Some folks sees mo' wid dey eyes shet den dey do wid um open. Now, you jes up an' tell me whut's in dat head o' you'n. I allus tole you yo' head's lack a sasser o' 'lasses in fly-time."

Then Ben obediently detailed to her what he had seen and heard, how he had by accident witnessed the meeting of his young mistress with "Mars Lawrance," and heard him declare his love for her, and how she had listened with no signs of disapproval. All of which was told with many embellishments and liberal if not altogether apt comparisons. Aunt Lylie listened with very ill-concealed inter-

est, and the while she was evidently busy with her own thoughts. When Ben had finished she was silent for a minute and then said, with feigned indifference:

"Is dat whut you takin' on so 'bout? You 'ten' lack hit sumpin sho'nuff You know 'bout as much 'bout white folks' perceedin's as a hog knows 'bout hebb'n. When you done an' lib in de house wid um day an' night till de chillun you played wid done an' got growed up chillun ob dey own, den you can talk."

This boast of superior advantages in the way of familiarity with the ways of the white people was a favorite weapon of Aunt Lylie's. With Ben it was usually an effective one, but this time he was ready with, "Ef I ain't been libbin wid white folks a hunderd years fo' de war, I spec' dese eyes an' years wan't made fur nuthin, an' when I sees a flower bloomin' an a bee comes hummin' 'roun', I knows what he's arter."

"Dat's a sign you mus' make yo'se'f, sca'ce, else you gwine git yo'se'f stun.

Now, Ben, hunny, lemme tell you, you's gittin pow'ful flighty in yo' mine eber sence you tuck to likin' dat yaller gal at de Lucases. You doan no mo'n know a han'-gourd fum a watermillion, an' how you spec' to know 'bout dis bizness you talkin' 'bout? Now, doan you go to puttin' no highfalutin obstructions on dat, an' I want you to promus yo' ole Mammie you won't open yo' head to nobody 'bout it, kase 'tain't no use to be gittin' yo'se'f in trouble. Here's dat sillibub I done an' sabe fur you. Now you done an' promus me, ain't you, hunny?"

"Why, Mammie," said Ben, "co'se I ain't gwine to be publicatin' fambly secrets, an' ef yo' min's so sot on it, I jes up an' furgit it myse'f, but what I seed I seed."

The sillibub soon disappeared, and so did Ben, only half aware of the commotion he had set up in Aunt Lylie's mind. As she went about her work she might have been heard talking the matter over with herself. This was one of her habits, indulged in most in her very serious moods.

When she had a knotty problem to solve she needed to talk it over with herself.

Thus she wrought at the new problem but now thrown on her motherly heart, while with busy hands she prepared the morning meal: "Dat's a oncommon brat fur shore. He's most as hard to fool as a mink, an' I 'clar he's as obsarvin' as a rabbit. An' so dey's two on um. It's who shall an' who shan't—Mars Lawrance or Mars Roswell. Laws, I know de men's gwine be worry'n dat chile. When I was settin' by de gyardin palin' las' night a thinkin' 'bout de day when Ole Mistiss tole me she want me stay wid Dodie, I ain't 'spicion I gwine hear whut I did. When I hear Mars Roswell 'gin dat saf' talk, I doan know whut Dodie gwine do. But she doan need nobody to tell 'er. When she spoke up so proud an' cyar'd 'erse'f so high, I say, 'Thank de Lawd, the sperrit o' de mudder's in de chile.' An' jes to think she's gro'd up, an' come to be a woman, an' nobody to look arter 'er' cep' her poor ole black

Mammie. But" (after a thoughtful pause) "de Lawd knows I gwine do my bes' an'—." Here the door-bell to the big house abruptly broke off the soliloquy.

Let the reader who takes offense at being ushered into this story by way of the kitchen take leave of us now, for we warn that respectable individual that the offense is likely to be repeated many times before we are through with this glance at life as it was but is no longer. But before we part let me whisper that this kitchen belonged to a period when the kitchen of the South was a highly respectable place—a very different thing from what it has become under the new regime—and that personages were not infrequently found reigning there well worthy to be numbered among one's acquaintances. If my reader should chance to belong to the older generation, that sentence will meet with approval and compel a sigh for the good old days; that is, if this same reader chances also to be a dweller in the sunny regions round about Vandalia,

the town—sometimes by courtesy called city—into which we have made our entrance by this humble route. This town is typically Southern and also ante-bellum. It had grown up in that golden age of the South when the land was fertile, the fields wide, the negro strong and not idle, and cotton was king. Everything about it was on a broad and liberal scale, as if the chivalry, generosity and proverbial hospitality of its people had written themselves large in these material forms, that all the world might read. The streets were broad, lawns extensive and houses massive, with great pillared porches, with no gew-gaws, but simple elegance the fundamental architectural law. There were trees everywhere. They lined the walks and avenues, kept lordly watch in the squares, and shaded with their interlacing branches the spacious and grass-covered lawns of the more pretentious homes. There was that about its appearance which provoked the deep breath of content and inspired the upward look.

On the west side of the town, sweeping northward, was a range of wooded hills. Through these hills Clear Creek glided, with many a fall and rapid, with much year-round spray and dash and gurgle; then circled like a band of polished silver the southern limits of the town. One railroad like a single artery bound this town to the rest of the world's great life. Thus, with vast fields, meadows, pasture-lands around it, stretching away beneath the ravished eye of the beholder, was Vandalia, before the guns of Fort Sumter woke the thunders of war. Somewhat different now, as well it might be, after having lain in the center of that four-years' whirlwind and fire. Still it was Vandalia, with charred fences, neglected fields, felled forests, ditched and grave-scarred landscapes, empty sleeves, crutches, crushed hopes, but withal much that fire could not burn nor grape and bomb destroy—proud traditions, fortitude, faith in God and courage to begin over. Her sons and daughters did as do trees in a storm—the weak

went down, the less weak only bent before it, the strong—and they were many—faced it, grappled it, and stood for that better time that has since come, crowned with the nobler conquest on whose escutcheon there is no blood, and in whose track of widening glory there are no tears.

Into this town came Lawrance Kenyon, hunting an outlet into the world. He found it in the large store of Melton & Ford, whose service he entered as bookkeeper on the first of January, 1868. He began at the same time the study of law, which he pursued as his work in the store permitted. This gave him no time for society, but he cared not for that. His only capital was a healthy brain and a stout heart, and he must make the most of these. He soon began to win his way. The stranger, who had been taken by the community on trial, if not on suspicion, was beginning to be trusted. He was slowly clearing a space about him in which to live his life. Thus must every soul, as a settler in a new continent thick with virgin forests and

pathless, clear for himself space and blaze his own path, or sit forever entangled in the wilderness of indolence. All that Lawrance had inherited from the past was within him—health, courage, and a will to try. In truth, what else could he? What else is worth inheriting? The world lies at the feet of him who has these. To him who has them not, other things, titles, names, escutcheons, wealth, come in vain. The world, all worlds, will deny to him all that it is worth while to crave. The things men inherit are mostly weights; they must grow their own wings. We inherit mostly the names, the empty husks of things; the things themselves we must win. When the things themselves are won, we sometimes find they have other names and wear other outer forms—names and forms the world will not recognize, for wisdom alone “is justified of her children.” Nobleman was two words till made into one by those who were willing to pay high for showy titles, and then it lost its meaning. Wealth no longer has any kin-

ship to "weal;" it has to do only with dollars. Our hero was not hampered by any of these dead-weights, for he was fortunate enough to be born poor, and his parents were simply honest, unknown people. When he turned from the grave of his mother, he was alone in the world, and he set out with high ideals and higher hopes to try what he might do. A good presence, a warm heart, a quick imagination, he was a man you would like at once and love later on.

CHAPTER II.

A NOVEL INTRODUCTION.

Dora Melton had but lately returned from Boston, where she had been at school since the death of her mother. Thither she had gone because an aunt on her mother's side lived there. Less than three years had changed her from girl to woman. When she returned she had already crossed the line that divides between the flowerland of girlhood and the soberer, yet sunny, land of womanhood. But she had carried over more of what was truest and best than most people do. To the strength and maturity of the woman she added the charm and simplicity of the child. She seemed to have absorbed the very sunshine of her native skies and the wayward, playful breezes that chased each other over her native hills. She was artless, caring to be only herself, which was

enough. Such, with sunny hair and blue eyes, round, large and lustrous—a face all animation, with more spirit than color, yet fair to behold—with that nameless charm about her that pleases more than beauty, form graceful, with movement rather quick and energetic, was Dora Melton. Add to this that she was the only daughter and only living child of Mr. George Melton, senior member of the firm of Melton & Ford, and one of the oldest, most honored and wealthiest citizens of Vandalia.

The first Sunday after her homecoming she went to church with her father. Lawrance Kenyon sat opposite Mr. Melton's pew. She entered, and he said, "She's proud." She turned her look his way, and he said, "She's interesting; what eyes! what hair!" She gave devout attention, and he said, "She's pious." He saw her smile at a child that nodded on the seat in front of her, and he said, "She's frivolous." He saw her eyes fill with tears at some pathetic passages in the sermon, and he said, "She's

sentimental." The fact is, we are afraid he did not hear nor see much else, he was so busy with his inventory of this young life. He found his conclusions unsatisfying and contradictory, as any inventory of that vast, fathomless something we call human nature is apt to be. The most mysterious thing of all was why he had taken any interest in this young lady at all. To this he could give no answer satisfactory to himself. He also was an unsolved problem, an unanalyzable quantity, with ever new and unfamiliar elements coming into view. Here was one element of a new sort, this unaccountable interest in Dora Melton, not only difficult to comprehend, but also hard to control.

That afternoon Lawrance had a chance to study his problem at closer range. It came about in quite an unexpected way. He was taking a stroll just as twilight began to shake the gold of sunset from its meshes. His way led him down beside the laughing and limpid waters of Clear Creek toward a spot where the current ran

close into the bluff, whose rocky rampart gave it a check and a sharp turn. It rippled over wide and sandy shallows above this, but here the obstruction had fretted its channel to a much greater depth. A large boulder, that by some upheaval or downheaval somewhere in the dim past had been torn from the bluff, lifted its age-rounded head in mid-stream. What was Lawrance's astonishment when he came in full view of this miniature island to discover that it was inhabited! There, perched on the summit of that rock, was none other than Dora Melton. His first impulse was to turn back, for he felt that he ought not to intrude on her privacy. This impulse was checked by the discovery that there was no earthly way for her to have got there without wading or swimming, as the rock was at least ten feet from the bank and with no visible connection with it. Besides, she lifted up a face in whose expression mirth and confusion were so strangely blended that one would wish to know what it meant—that is, Law-

rance did. It was like an unfinished story. The expression was as charming as it was curious. When her eyes met his she broke into a laugh that was all the more musical for the tears that it concealed. Now Lawrance was not only embarrassed, he was offended. He did not at all relish being laughed at by a strange young lady in that fashion. He doubtless showed it, and was about to turn away, when she said in a manner as natural and unaffected as that of a child:

"Please don't run away. I am entirely harmless, and I did not mean to be rude."

Lawrance lifted his hat and bowed in token of surrender, and we suspect that he smiled. She continued:

"I am sorry to have to trouble you, but I fear I shall have to ask you to help me out of this."

Then he was at his ease, as men always are when they have a recognized advantage.

He drew nearer.

"Pardon me," he said, "but how on earth did you come to be there?"

"The question that interests me now is how I am to get away. Please help me to solve that first. You will find a plank down there," and she pointed down the stream to where a plank lay against the bank.

Lawrance soon had the plank in place and, though a narrow bridge, it was sufficient, and with a little steady-ing Dora was soon on shore. Then she extended her hand with a frank, unstudied cordiality, saying: "I am Dora Melton, and I believe you are Mr. Kenyon. Allow me to thank you, but I am sorry I made you soil your clothes."

"My only regret is, Miss Melton, that you did not set me a harder task, that I might have had some claim to your gratitude. I would gladly have brought you two planks, so you see I am still in debt to you."

"Don't be afraid that I shall press my claim, if it is to cost me another experience like that," she said.

"Then allow me to increase the debt by claiming the privilege of seeing you home, since it is growing late."

As they walked along amid the deepening shadows, she relieved his curiosity as to how she came to be on the rock. "You see," she said, "I came down here, as I often do, for a breath of air and a glimpse of nature. It is so close to the house that I feel entirely safe, and I enjoy the quiet and seclusion. This afternoon I brought a book for an hour's reading. When I saw that rock, with the plank extending out to it, I thought how delightful it would be to sit out there and read awhile. Walking the plank was a little risky, but I like risks, and so I ventured. I was careless and, in turning, caught my skirt on the end of the plank and threw it into the water. I felt very helpless as I saw it drift away, leaving me a prisoner. I was a little too far from the house to make myself heard, and I did not relish the idea of waiting there till some one came in search of me. I never before wanted to be a mermaid and never was more certain that I was entirely human. My situation was

really becoming serious when you arrived on the scene."

Lawrance felt himself at liberty to laugh, as he had been strongly tempted to do when he first realized the situation.

"I am afraid I was not altogether courteous at first, but my apology is that I had never seen anybody in just that plight before. I shall know how to act next time."

"I am resolved there shall be no next time so far as I am concerned, and I must exact a promise of you not to tell of this, for it is really too ridiculous, and I should never hear the last of it."

Would he promise? Who ever heard of a man who would not promise anything under such circumstances? He only wished there were a thousand secrets to be kept for her instead of one, or something desperate and heroic to be done. He would at that moment have taken an oath not to speak at all for a month if she had so much as remotely hinted that such

a thing was desirable, though he would have broken it in an hour.

They had reached the little path leading up the steep slope to the rear garden gate of the Melton mansion. Here Lawrance said good evening amid thanks, and they parted. He had thought of many fine things that might be said, but usually the fine things that might be said are never said. They are either afterthoughts or only forethoughts. Most people can testify that not only the things that might have been are sad, but also the things that might have been said. Lawrance had thought of Andromeda chained to the rock, but she had her Perseus, and that spoilt it for his use on this occasion. Then he thought of the youth who saw the reflection of his own face in the water and became enamored of its beauty—yes, it was Narcissus—but he couldn't make it fit. He thought of Crusoe and of a couplet that he had somewhere read about a "sea-girt rock," but the whole opportunity slipped by without his once displaying his erudition. He had

talked plain prose ; it seemed to him about the prosiest prose that he had ever been guilty of using. He saw Dora bound up the path with tread quick and light, such as belongs to all innocent and happy beings; he saw her lithe, graceful form outlined against the darkening sky and heard her musical voice still sounding in his ears.

Lawrance, a knotty problem confronts you. Toil at it in the deepening twilight, but think not to solve it till innumerable twilights and no lights but unillumined midnights have passed you by. You are in love. Deny it as you may, pshaw! at it, as you no doubt are doing at this moment there on the edge of the night, you can never be as you were. The fatal arrow has struck home and quivers deep-buried in your heart—so deep that when it is drawn the torn heart will come with it. That sweetest, bitterest chapter in life's volume has been begun and must be written out to the last syllable, whatever the end may be. It is the chapter, though

blotted with tears, that gives all coherence to the story of life, without which it were an enigma, all meaningless and undecipherable.

After the episode of the rescue, Dora and Lawrance met occasionally on the footing of acquaintances. The memory of the accident that brought them face to face was sufficiently amusing to cause a smile when they met, and the consciousness of a secret, small and insignificant as it was, served to put them on good terms.

It was not long till he had an opportunity of seeing her in her own home. It was a theory of Mr. Melton's that a young man fit for his employ was also fit for his companionship, and that the hospitality one shows to his friends as a pleasure to himself ought to be extended to his employees as a duty to them. He lived up to his theory and occasionally invited his clerks and bookkeepers to take tea with him, and so threw over their lives the genial influence of that far-famed Southern hospitality. He invited Lawrance with one or two others.

Here he saw Dora in her best element, at home, and in her most agreeable mood. Naturally quick-witted and sunny, she was always agreeable; but here, in the atmosphere of the home, all her graces blossomed to perfection. On this particular evening she was unusually interesting. She liked Lawrence; he pleased her. Further than that she had not so much as thought, that is if people understand what they think. Let us frankly acknowledge ourselves incapable of fathoming the commonest things. The swift and subtle influences that make for destiny we may not trace nor explain. The merest accident may turn the tide of a life for good or ill. While we eat and drink and chaffer and trade, the swift shuttles are flying through the woof of life. We only know it when it is done. To describe the nimble hours of delight passed, all too quickly, at that home on that memorable evening would be to describe a thousand of the same kind as they appear on the surface. That would be prosy, but the reality was anything else but

prosy, and the result will take time to tell.

That night Lawrance returned to his room in a delightful state of excitement. He frankly acknowledged himself in love. He even went so far as to persuade himself that he was loved in return. Such is the beautiful confidence of love in its infancy; but alas! it soon outgrows that. The little sleep that fell on his eyelids that night was filled with dreams of Dora. When he awoke his mood had changed. He saw things in a soberer light—if second thoughts are always soberer, which we gravely doubt, for thinking itself sometimes intoxicates and the judgment is blurred. The soul often soars on the wings of a sudden inspiration to heights of truth that it can never reach by slow plodding. At any rate, Lawrance got back to a state of doubt and misery, and we call that sober—perhaps because it is stupid. What a fool he had been, he thought, to fancy that petted daughter of a rich, aristocratic father fairly throwing herself into the arms of a

poor dog with neither wealth, wit nor pedigree to commend him, and on short acquaintance at that! A romping, good-natured girl had treated him kindly—probably only because she was good-natured—and straightway he had built a fairy palace such as Grimm never dreamed of. He did what most of us have done—laughed at himself, bantered himself, called himself names and strove to whip himself into what he considered a sensible frame of mind. In reality he succeeded in bringing himself down to the level of ordinary stupidity. This ox-like nature of ours refuses to be driven at a breakneck speed, but must pause and browse amid the brambles of the prosaic now and then.

By breakfast time Lawrance fancied himself tolerably rational. He had resolved, as thousands before had done, not to make a fool of himself—a resolution as vain for him as it had been for all the other thousands. During the day he had made no less than a dozen false entries. He could not add the simplest column of figures.

to her the charm of picturesqueness. She was brought up with Dora's mother, and Dora had been largely brought up by her. She knew little of freedom and cared less. She held strenuously by the old traditions and had a hearty contempt for the new regime. She was house-girl to Mrs. Melton from the time of her marriage and became nurse and "black Mammie" to Dora, which office was a prouder one to her than that of empress would have been. Happiness consists, according to Mr. Carlyle, not so much in increasing the numerator of the human fraction as in decreasing the denominator. Think you deserve to be hanged and you will count it a luxury to be shot. Aunt Lylie's office filled the measure of her ambition. To serve in it to the end was her sole purpose. Larger questions did not trouble her mind. To her there were no larger questions. That one home was her world, and Dora was its sovereign.

When Mr. Melton came to Dora's room immediately after news of the Emancipation Proclamation reached

him, he found Aunt Lylie assisting his daughter to make her morning toilet, in spite of the protest of that spirited girl. Through the open door from the hall he could see her kneeling to tie Dora's shoes, and he stopped to listen to Aunt Lylie: "What fur you gittin dese new fanglesome notions in yo' li'l' haid, dat you gwine do fo' yo'se'f? Doan you know dem li'l' white han's wa'n't made fur wuk no-how? Yo' ole black Mammie ain't gwine 'low you to do no drubbery while dese ole han's kin do fur you. I heahs mighty cu'ious things bout niggahs gwine be free, and dey gittin so no' count dese days I 'spec' heap o' white folks got to be up an' doin', but you ain't, long as ole black Mammie's stren't' hol' out."

Such was her devotion to an institution that seemed so eminently proper to her simple mind. While she was speaking, Mr. Melton was thinking whether it was wise, even humane, to thrust on these people freedom with its accompanying problem of self-support. The scene before him brought

up the tender, beautiful past, and set him to thinking of the future with its changed relations and its unsolved problems. His people had conquered the wild forests of the Southland and built a civilization of which he was justly proud. It was not perfect, this he acknowledged; perhaps slavery was not the least of its imperfections, but as he looked upon Aunt Lylie that morning, he felt in his heart that her condition was not to be bettered by this change. He and his people must now begin anew, and work out a harder problem than has yet faced any people. There was many a Southern home that morning in which the scene was duplicated.

Something else was smitten besides the shackles of slavery, something else felt the thunderblow of the Proclamation besides the foundations of a much-hated institution. Many a tie, only a little less tender than those of blood, snapped under the penstroke of Abraham Lincoln, and many a faithful heart quivered with anguish. If it

was the birth-hour of a race it was not without travail.

Mr. Melton tried to speak cheerfully.

"Well, Lylie, I have good news for you? The jubilee that I have heard the darkies sing about has come. You are free now, all the negroes are free. Abraham Lincoln yesterday signed the Proclamation which gives freedom to all the slaves in the country. Yesterday you belonged to me, to-day you can go where you will, do as you choose."

She had listened with mouth and eyes opening wider and wider till he finished, then she broke out: "What Mars Linkum got to do wid us? 'Spec' he better 'ten' to his own niggahs. Sides, I doan' know him, nebber seed 'im; but I knows you, Mars George, an' I knows my li'l lam, 'ere, an I ain' axin nobody to cum pryin' 'roun' udder folk's bisness what doan consarn um."

He explained to her as best he could how it all came about, and how all the darkies in the neighborhood were rejoicing, and leaving their old masters

and mistresses to enjoy their new free dom.

She replied in a tone of lofty contempt: "I bin hear niggahs talk 'bout what gwine happen, and how dem yankees gwine sot us free. But I 'low'd ef dey talkin' 'bout dat blue-coat trash what bin prowlin' 'roun' de kentry, killin' de chickens, ca'yin' off de hosses, an' bu'nin' houses, an' libin' of'n de hard arnins of dem what wuk fur it, I ain' 'spectin' much fum um, an' I ain' nudder. Ef niggahs ain' got no mo' sense en ter take arter ev'y jack-o-molantern what comes 'long twel hit leads um in a swamp, dey kin go. Ole Lylie ain' tekin' up wid no sich. Heah I is, an' heah I gwine stay 'cepin' you dribe me off, ain' I, honey?" Here she looked appealingly into the face of Dora who all this time had been sitting silent, astonishment, pain and indignation mingling in her face. She threw her arms around the old negro's neck for answer and the tears fell while the black hands stroked her sunny hair, and as her master turned away he heard Aunt Lylie murmur:

"Ole black Mammie won' leab you, honey, case she dun tole yo mudder she won't."

From that day it was settled. Her ear was not bored through with an awl, there was no new bill of sale, but only the heart gave its seal to the most real as well as the noblest bondage, and she was still a slave. An empire could not have tempted her away. Proclamations may change institutions, wars may break the course of empires, but the mysterious kingdom of the human heart, be it of Puritan or Cavalier, of white or black, defies alike presidents and potentates, congresses and armies.

Mrs. Melton on her death-bed had committed her daughter to the care of her faithful servant. Aunt Lylie had assumed the charge with the double ardor born of her devotion to her departed mistress and her tender love for Dora. She lingered by the bedside of her dying mistress to the last, watchful of every opportunity to smooth the way for the feet she loved. It was she who composed the lifeless

form, straightened the pillows, tucked the cover as she had done a thousand times before for the living, with wonderful composure, and, stroking the white forehead, said tenderly, "Dar now, honey," then turned and almost fled from the room. When she reached her own room a shriek broke from her like the wail of a lost spirit, and throwing herself across the bed she poured out her soul in a grief as genuine as ever broke a human heart. She followed the body to the grave, kept careful watch that no speck of dust was on the coffin, and groaned when the pall-bearers made a false step, as if they had trod on her heart. As the procession passed out of the house she slipped aside and pulled a bunch of lilacs. When the grave was filled, and the mourners filed away, she lingered with bowed head till the last had departed. Then approaching the grave she knelt and deposited her bunch of lilacs near the head, saying between her sobs: "I brung um fur you, honey, kase you loved um so, an' I members you tole me de name ob

um mos' same as mine. I knowed you'd love to have one li'l' flower on yo' grabe from the han' o' yo' po' Lylie. I doan know how 'tis, but ef you kin he'p a body fum wha' you is, he'p me to stan' by de po' li'l lam', kase I gwine do my best fur 'er, and bofe un us gwine come on arter 'while."

That night she tucked the motherless girl away in bed and sat by her side till she fancied her asleep, saying to her all the comforting things she could command, telling her beautiful things about her mother and assuring her that "de same eyes what wep' at de grabe o' Laz'rus lookin' at us an' countin' our tears same as a boy counts 'is marbles, an' he ain't gwine leab us tell he put us 'longside o' yo' mud-der, whar dey doan weep no mo'."

When she thought Dora was asleep, she knelt by the bed before going to her own pallet in the same room, and in a low voice began to pray:

"O Lawd, sometimes hit seem lack you fur away lack de stars, an' you doan hear us when de heart's hebby

an' sad, but now hit pear lack you's mighty close to me an' Dodie, an' you makin' her furgit her sorrer in sleep an' comfortin' me in de darkness. We heard tell how you cums close in time o' trubble, an' it's true, an' you kin he'p a po' body lack me, an' put yo' arms 'roun' dis mudderless chile, same as ef we's wise an' great. Lawd, we's mighty feeble an' de light ob our eyes dun put out wid weepin', an' we so lonesome 'dout mistiss. We doan know whar she is, but we know she whar you is, fur she was good an' she tole us she gwine be wid you. Lawd, could you jes tell 'er fur po' ole Lylie dat I right here by her chile tryin' to shiel' 'er fum de trubble an' dat I prayin' fur 'er while she sleepin'. De worl' so big and wide an' de way so rough fur de feet ob dem what ain't got no mudder to lead um, please be good to dis po' chile. Ef you do haf to sen' trubble, sen' it on me; when de bow's bent let de arrer strike dis bres', but keep dis chile fum de pain. Lawd, he'p me, so Ole Mistiss 'll be satisfied. Doan lemme make no blunders, and

when my eyes can't see de way take me byde han' an' lead me, an' I'll lead de lam' wid de udder han'. Bless Ole Marster, fur his heart's dun bruk, an' doan le'm furgit de promus dat he gwine meet Ole Mistiss at las'. Ef you kin, let 'er come sometime an' kine o' tech 'im wid 'er wing an' somehow say sof' lack, 'I'm here'.

"An Lawd, fix a place fur us, fur we all cummin by'm-by. When de li'l' lam' git settled and fixed, an' de way git clar fo' 'er feet, an' she doan need me no' mo', den lemme come to Mistiss an' he'p git ev'ything ready fur Dodie, fur I want to have a han' in makin' things tidy fur 'er fo she comes."

Then she gave a few additional touches to the cover and stole to her pallet and lay down. Peaceful and prayerful center this, where, in the beauty of confidence and fidelity, these two lie sleeping, while war and strife resound without.

CHAPTER IV.

WHAT CAME OF A LAWN PARTY.

When Lawrance Kenyon received an invitation to a lawn party to be given by Miss Dora Melton on the evening of the first of May, he was not philosopher enough to take it calmly. He had tried to persuade himself to think no more of Dora and had, he vainly imagined, succeeded to a tolerable degree. He had worked, or tried to work, more industriously and study more constantly. But those who have tried it will not be hard on him if it is openly confessed that he found it difficult to supplant the sweet image of Dora with figures in a ledger or to exchange the radiant dreams of love for the deep things of legal lore. That period has come, or if it has not, come it will to us all, when the interests and energies of life gather about one object, when the soul's

whole empire falls under one scepter, and the will is powerless to break the soothing sway or expel the pleasing tyrant. Once the heart is caught in the meshes of that silken but powerful net, struggle is not only vain and useless but it tightens the fatal web more and more about its victim. Lawrance Kenyon was weary with his fruitless struggles. He had not yet consented to surrender, nor had he yielded to the thought that Dora was absolutely essential to his happiness. When, however, he received the invitation and decided to go, all his bulwarks gave way and his wise maxims went down like reeds before a flood. When he was dressed and ready to go he hesitated. His heart beat violently, his hand trembled, and he was angry with himself for his unusual agitation. For the fortieth time he looked in the glass and adjusted his tie, not that he saw any need of it, or, for that matter, knew what he did, but because there was nothing else to occupy his time. Several times he resolved not to go, but he ought to have known beforehand

that such resolutions were vain and futile.

When he reached the front gate he beheld before him a brilliant and beautiful scene. Along the line of maples on either side of the gravel walk were festoons of bunting, and many-colored Chinese lanterns hung beneath the boughs. On the spacious lawn to the left merry young people were flitting to and fro like so many birds. The moon was just rising, and its full tide of mellow light fell on the east-looking porch, whose tall white Corinthian columns gleamed through the fresh young foliage. Lawrance paused to take in the scene. It seemed to him a fitting scene as a background for Dora, but only a background, for to him all he saw of things and people had no meaning except as they were connected with her. It was in perfect keeping with his conception of her that she should receive her friends under nature's starry blue and with nature's dewy green beneath their feet. As his eyes sought through the lawn for the central figure of the picture, he saw

her enter the house alone. Quickly he entered the gate and hastened up the walk. What his intentions were he scarcely knew, but somehow there was a wild, intense wish in his heart to meet Dora alone. He did not mean to say anything more than the most common-place things, such things as would be said to her by a score of people that evening, but to speak to her alone, with no other ear to hear, would be a great happiness to him. Close to the porch stood a beech whose boughs reached to the roof and formed a sort of nature's *porte cochere*. As he approached this tree Lawrance paused to calm his excited nerves and to decide whether to enter the house or to wait for Dora's return, which he was sure would not be long. Before he had time to collect himself she came across the porch, and hurrying forward as she came down the steps humming a tune, he met her just in the shadow of the big beech. When he saw her come out on the porch his whole being thrilled with admiration, and as she drew nearer, his emotion approached

closely to adoration. She was simply dressed, but in exquisite taste. There was a single rose in her hair and another at her throat. Those were her only ornaments. She had just thrown loosely around her shoulders a light wrap which she had not yet adjusted, and she looked like a bird with plumage ruffled from excess of joy. Lawrance had never seen even her look half so beautiful. Had he been seeking for a picture of perfect loveliness he could have wished no more. He simply did what was inevitable, what he must do, surrender himself a complete captive to her charms. What else he did or said he scarcely knew. He only knew that this was Dora and that they were face to face alone. He stepped forward, extended his hand, which she took with an exclamation of pleasure and in the half-light Lawrance detected the blush that mantled her cheeks.

Powder wants only a spark to explode, love wants only an opportunity to speak. They were unobserved by the guests who were gathered in a distant part of the lawn, and

his entrance had not been noticed. Under the lace-like leaves of the beech, in the moonlight, the awkward, eloquent story, old as the race yet ever new as the untrod continent of human experience, was told. He seized her hand, but that was the only greeting. The anticipated commonplaces his lips refused. The only speech to which they would lend themselves was to voice the secret that was burning in his heart: "Dora, forgive me, but I love you. Since I first saw you your image has been in my heart, your name on my lips. Thoughts of you have filled my mind waking or sleeping. When I have thought of living without you my heart has ached with unspeakable agony. When I have thought of the possibility of calling you my own, I have had a taste of Paradise. I ask no more than the privilege of saying I love you. Were the barriers between us ten thousand times what they are, it would still be a sweet solace to me to speak. I have nothing to offer you but a heart that would find its highest happiness in

shedding its blood for you, no merit to plead but a love as intense and pure as ever dwelt in human bosom. If my love is wicked it is only because it is idolatry, and God will forgive me that, for I can not help it. I am poor, I am unknown, I am nothing, and till this moment I have laughed at the thought of telling you my secret. Now it seems to me if you would trust me, if you would let me toil and strive for your sake, I could conquer worlds. Any task you would smile on would be easy. Without you my life is blank. It has no other charm. With you it would be enough to live, to toil, so that you were near. O Dora, it is madness to speak thus to you, but if it be so it is the madness of love. I did not mean to say one word of this to you, but when I saw you I could not help it. If you do not, can not, return my love, I shall not blame you. Why should you care for me? I have asked myself this question a thousand times. Nevertheless, I shall love you forever. Henceforth, as permanent as memory or hope, love for you is part of my

being. And whatever fate decrees for you and me, remember that one man will adore you forever. Do not speak yet. I am afraid your words would blast my hopes, and I would cherish yet a little the glimpse of Paradise before I plunge into outer darkness. O Dora, you can not know how I love you."

He had spoken rapidly, passionately, all the time holding her hand and bending his face close to hers. His voice was low, but his words came like arrows from the string of a taut bow. His soul was in every syllable, and that alone is eloquence. Dora seemed to be listening to the beating of his heart rather than to words. There was that light in her eyes while he spoke that no lover can mistake, and her quick breath, heaving bosom and cheek that grew a deeper and deeper crimson, told all too plainly that the story had fallen on willing ears. All this Lawrance recalled many a time in the lone agony of other days, and then he could feel in his closed palm the twitching of her fingers as

distinctly as on that night. Had she known what was to follow, how freely she would have spoken out of her own heart! But she did not know; alas, we never know. There was a moment of silence, a whippoorwill from far across the woodland shot its shrill staccato into the night, and the chirp of crickets kept time to the beating of their hearts.

Dora raised her eyes full to his and then Lawrance saw distinctly a tear trembling on each lid, and for him there was heaven in those tears. When she spoke her voice was calm and her speech more deliberate than his had been, but it was tender and tremulous:

"Mr. Kenyon, I should be insincere if I should say this is a surprise. I thought it would be so. It would be more than insincere for me to pretend to be indifferent to what you have said. More I may not say now. Wait till to-morrow."

"Say I may hope and I will wait a thousand years, if I must," said Lawrance.

"You may hope; and now I must go."

"May I call to-morrow evening?"

"Yes."

Then she left him to meet some of her young friends that were seeking her.

Lawrance was not the only suitor at the lawn party that evening. Later in the evening when refreshments had been served and the guests were promenading about the lawn, or gathered in twos, or in small groups for conversation, Roswell Grantley sought Dora for a promenade. He was one of the wealthy young men of the town. His father was for a long time a private banker. The relation between him and Dora's father had been of the closest, both socially and commercially. When the father died a few years before, Roswell succeeded to the wealth and the business of the father. He had paid some attention to Dora since her return from school, which she had received from courtesy but had not encouraged especially. Still, she was glad now of an opportunity to

speaking with him. There was something in her mind she wished to say to him. This was her opportunity, a better opportunity than she anticipated. They passed across the lawn towards the garden almost in silence. When they were alone, he said:

"Dora, do you know why I am here to-night, why I have sought to speak to you? I came here with one purpose. Since I came that purpose has grown stronger. I could not let another hour pass without carrying it out. It is to offer you my life; to ask you to be my wife. The happiness of my future depends on your decision. I have thought of you in that light ever since you were a wayward, romping girl. Since your return from school it has become the dominant desire of my life to have you for my own, and I have accustomed myself to the thought that you would consent." He paused for reply.

There was silence for a minute.

When she spoke it was in measured tones, as if every word were being

weighed and tested. They were like so many dagger-strokes.

"Mr. Grantley," she said, "I must be candid. I have no motive to be otherwise. What you profess to desire can never be. If there were ever a time when such a thing were even remotely possible, that time is past. Yonder with the crowd is a woman who was my playmate in childhood. Together we have sat for hours beneath these branches in the summer afternoons watching the butterflies among the flowers. They call woman's friendship fickle and brief. It is not of such material ours was formed. Hers is a pure and guileless nature, a heart that has no room for falsehood. When I heard that her father had lost all and she, brave, noble girl, had thrown herself into the struggle, even taking a position as governess to support the broken old man, I honored her, I loved her yet the more."

"Dora, why will you—?" He spoke in a half-terrified way, but with an imperious gesture she stopped him.

"Do not interrupt me please, I am giving you my answer. When I learned through her letters, always confiding, that you had wooed and won that noble heart, if it threw a shadow over some girlish fancies of my own, what of it? Let that pass. You won that heart completely—for what? To crush it wantonly as you crush those rose-petals between your fingers now, to fling it away, to condemn it to lifelong disappointment or speedy death."

"For God's sake, Dora!" he almost gasped, but she went on not heeding his appeal.

"When I saw her pale cheek, when I heard her story, when I pillowed her head on my bosom and felt the surging of her sorrow, do you count it a sin that my resentment awoke? I said then, I say now, you are false. Were I to marry you, the voice of my mother who taught me what truth and honor are would accuse me from behind yonder stars and cry in my ears, 'Shame! shame!' Moreover, the pale sweet face of that girl yonder would haunt me to my grave, and my own

conscience would condemn me for marrying a man whom I can not even respect."

She ceased speaking and a sob she could not longer restrain gave emphasis to what she had said. The laughter of the guests fell on their ears.

"Dora, will you hear me? Do you not know that the wayward fancies of the heart often play us traitors and lead whither the judgment can not follow? Do not most people have some such follies to regret? And who knows whether to pity or to blame!"

"I am familiar," said Dora, "with the code that governs in the world of show, I also know something of the eternal principles of truth, and that there are hearts that are not wayward nor fickle, and at this moment there is one in a woman's bosom dying for a man who is not worthy the slightest pin-scratch on her little finger. I know also one manly heart that would suffer roasting on live coals before it would beat false to a woman's trust, but it beats in another bosom than yours."

"Dora, Dora!" came from the crowd, and she turned away.

The reader has already seen in this chapter the grounds of the conversation between Ben and Aunt Lylie given in the first chapter. By chance Ben was a witness to the first scene, and his mother saw and heard the second courtship with an interest that we are afraid would have prompted her to seek by stealth what accident threw in her way.

CHAPTER V.

WISE COUNSEL FROM A GOOD SOURCE.

It was long after Mr. Melton had taken his breakfast alone and gone away to his business, when Dora came out from her room. The events of the day before had broken in on the even tenor of her life with a suddenness that upset her nerves not a little, and it was very late before she slept, and it was far into the morning when she awoke. When she came out into the yard, a scene of peace and beauty greeted her eyes. The sun hung high up in the cloudless sky. The canary, whose cage hung in the hall, was singing as if the world depended on it. From the topmost twig of the big beech a mocking-bird was pouring forth his morning hymn in a perfect river of melody, composed of rivulets from all the mountain heights of song-land. High on the wind-swayed

branch of a sugar-maple a Baltimore oriole seemed struggling to turn the brilliant colors of his body into tinkling snatches of song. The sun was pouring a flood of glory on the green of the pasture-lands that sloped away to the westward, and sifting through the tender leaves it wrought a patchwork of gold on the green grass beneath, studded still with dew that glinted and flashed like a million diamonds. Dora walked out and stood beneath the same boughs that had sheltered her and her lover the night before, the sunshine on her hair, and health and happiness stamped on her fresh young face. With that happiness was a nameless something, a touch of womanly seriousness, that had only come there in the last few hours, but had come to stay, and constituted a new charm. As she stood there drinking in with exquisite relish the balm and beauty and melody of nature, a honey-bee, on the hunt for sweets, lighted on her hair, and when he attempted to fly away he had become entangled in the golden meshes,

and so was held buzzing there in a most exciting and warlike fashion. Thanks to abundant hair Dora was not stung, and thanks to strong nerves she did not scream. Aunt Lylie had come to the kitchen door and was looking at Dora, who had not observed her. These two, combining the beautiful and the picturesque, were the only two persons about the place.

"Honey, whut you standin' dar fur stid o' comin' fur yo' brekfus'?" was her greeting.

"Come quick and get this bee out of my hair or I shall be stung," said Dora, holding her charming head to one side.

Aunt Lylie hurried to meet her and with a dexterous whisk of her apron released the captive bee and stood looking at Dora with a curious air.

"Why are you gazing at me in that fashion?" said Dora, affecting impatience. "Why don't you go and get me some breakfast? I am hungry."

"I's jes'a-thinkin' you's as putty as a hollyhawk, an' dat bee not de only pusson dat gwine to git tangled up in

yo' looks and can't git away when he tries," and laughing at her own wit she led the way to the kitchen. She had not told all she was thinking; she was thinking of Ben's allusion to the bee and the flower, and of Dora going first to the spot where the story was whispered in her ears the night before, and of that new something on her face.

Dora followed her to the kitchen, where she was to eat her breakfast, for the dining-room was too lonely. The breakfast had been kept hot and tempting by the faithful old darkey, but Dora made a poor pretense of eating. She was evidently mistaken about being hungry.

"Wha's yo' stomach gone to?" said Aunt Lylie. "You's eatin' lak a mouse wid a slow fever."

Dora did not reply but sat sipping her tea. A pair of nervous little sparrows were nesting in a Virginia creeper that Aunt Lylie had trained over the kitchen window. Dora was watching their pretty ways, when one of them hopped on the window-sill, and turning his cunning little head to

one side and looking straight at Dora piped, "Sweet, sweet, sweet," then flew away.

"Dat she am, honey, sho'," said Aunt Lylie, accepting the spontaneous admiration of the bird as a matter of course. In her idolatrous eyes it was not at all strange that birds and bees and men should pay homage at Dora's shrine.

"What's de matter?" asked Aunt Lylie after a few moments of silence. "Sumpin' dun happin to you or else hit gwine to happin, kase birds and bees and sich don't take a lakin' to nobody fur nothin'. You 'member when Ole Mars Jenkins died, a bee come an' lit on 'is coffin an' buzzed an' buzzed tell dey driv it away? He was a bee-hunter an' dey knowed 'e wa'n't gwine ter hunt um no mo'. 'Tain't all in de books, chile, an' you's got sumpin' on yo' mind." This was said in a serious tone, partly because she believed in such things, but more because she wanted to conceal the real source of her suspicions. She had a strategist's pride in getting at

the secret in her own way, and still more pride in testing the confidence of her young mistress. She clinched it all with, "My lammie ain't got no mudder to pectect 'er, an' I promus Ole Mistiss I gwine ter do de bes' I can fur you."

It would have been out of the question to withhold confidence after that last remark. "Mammie, if you had a chance to marry a rich banker or a poor bookkeeper, which one would you take?" was Dora's reply.

"Law sakes, honey, whut makes you ax me dat?"

"You see," said Dora, looking out at the window, and speaking as much to herself as to her interested auditor, "I am a curious body and do not do things as other people do. Perhaps it would have been the thing for me to fall in love with that Boston professor, who knew everything and wore an eye-glass, but was possessed of enough of the weakness of common mortals to fall in love with what he was pleased to call a Southern beauty,

when he ought to have been thinking of Greek roots and Latin metre."

Aunt Lylie could stand this no longer and so broke in with, "Whut's all dat you sayin'? I ain't keepin' up wid you."

But Dora went on without heeding the interruption. "My Auntie in Boston thought so, and I halfway thought so too; but it was not to be. Now I have a chance at a banker, and by all the rules of good society I ought to jump at the chance, but I just can't jump that way. I suppose I should have a carriage and no end of fine things, and be the envy of all my friends; but I prefer a sound heart and a clear conscience. I don't love the banker, and I can't marry him. I prefer a bookkeeper, with no family to prate about eternally; no money to make a fool of him; no great lot of book-learning to bore people with; with nothing but a brave, true heart and courage to face life and meet its foes without quailing." And so she had shaped into words what was running in her mind as she stood under the

beech, and Aunt Lylie was compelled to listen to what she only halfway understood. Then as if she had been serious too long already, the wayward girl jumped up with a burst of laughter and went waltzing around the room like a merry-hearted child. The child had got the better of the woman for a brief space. Stopping in front of the door she began to sing:

"I love the merry, merry sunshine,
It makes me feel so gay . . . "

Then the song was changed into a laugh as hearty and as musical as was the song. A pair of hens had run towards her singing each in her own key, as if joining in the song. "Look," said she, "what an audience I have. I must be a regular prima donna, don't you think, Mammie?"

"I don't know nothin' 'bout no preeny donnies, but I knows dem domineckers mighty good layers, do," was the answer that showed how well Aunt Lylie understood. She added, "I spec,' do, you better come an' le's see whut we gwine do 'bout dat business."

Dora sat down again. She looked

into the old black face before her with an expression which said as plain as words could have said it, "Now you are going to amuse me," and the expression misrepresented the facts just as words might do, for Dora had reason to trust Aunt Lylie's head and heart for something far more serious than amusement.

Breathing a sigh this counselor began: "I done an' 'spec' sumpin' gwine happen. When you fus' come home I said, 'Oomp-oo-oo! Mars George shore gwine loose dat gal an' dat soon, too.' But, honey, how you know Mars Kenyon gwine ax you to have 'im?"

She forgot that Dora had not mentioned that name, so had Dora.

"What downright impudence! Don't you think it likely he would?"

"Zac'ly, but whut you spectin' ain't always whut happen. Whut I wants to know is, how you knows it, den I can perceed."

"Well then, because he has already asked me."

"Laws a' massy, sho' nuff, sho' nuff, an' dat's whut de signs was a pintin'

to." Then the old face saddened, and the head moved as if swayed by an unresting thought, while tears gathered thick in the honest eyes. As that which she knew already was brought to her mind afresh, emphasized by the confession of Dora, the meaning of it all came home to her, and there was the pain of a great sacrifice in the words she murmured to herself, "An' de heart o' de li'l lam' done an' clean gone fum we all." Then there was silence for a time while the old fingers busied themselves in arranging the young mistress' hair, and caressing the very folds of her dress into the most graceful shape, as one might arrange the drapery of his idol. When Aunt Lylie spoke it was of the memories that had started up in her mind: "You mind me o' de time when yo' mudder tole me Ole Marster, dat's her pa, you know, done an' give' is promus she kin marry Mars George, an' I was gwine to go wid 'er. I's so glad den I fa'rly shouted. Dis is diffunt, fur I can't go wid you no great while." Then after another pause, "You mus'

jes go and tell Mars George all about it. He wants you to trus' him, den he trus' you. But dat 'bout Mars Kenyon ain' got no fam'ly to brag on ain't gwine be no gret sight o' he'p, an' I wouldn' tell 'im dat, fur 'e's got a tech o' dat 'isse'f. I allus was a-thinkin' we de ve'y cream o' creation. Onc't when one o' dem Lucas wenches told me our people wa'nt much nohow but dey folks was de ve'y top o' de pot, I tole 'er I spec' so, fur we allus skum off de top and flung it away."

More was said than it belongs to this story to rehearse, and then they parted, Dora to do as her counselor had suggested, and Aunt Lylie to do the fullest that was in her to secure the happiness of her "chile."

CHAPTER VI.

A PEEP AT MISERY.

"Mister, mister, please come home with me. I'm feared the old man'll kill mother. He's crazy drunk and as mad as a tiger."

This was blurted out by a shabby urchin who came out on the street from a miserable tenement row. He was bare-headed, bare-footed, and the rest not much above that level. He was breathless with excitement and fear. He burst into the street leading to the depot just as Lawrance Kenyon was passing on his way to look after some freight for the firm. The aspect and earnestness of the boy left no room for questioning or hesitation. There was no policeman in sight, so he followed the boy in all haste. As they drew near to a tumble-down shanty, screams and pleadings lent speed to Lawrance, and passing his guide he entered the

door, and there a scene met his gaze that stirred all the deep indignation of his soul. A man half-crazed by drink was dragging a pale, feeble woman by her hair. He had snatched her from the sick-bed, and was dragging her, with brutal cursing, toward the door, in spite of her piteous pleading.

"Stop, you scoundrell!" was the greeting with which Lawrance confronted him, at the same time laying no gentle hand on his shoulder. Dropping the woman, who fell to the floor with a groan, the brute turned furiously on Lawrance with an oath. One blow from Lawrance's fist sent him sprawling on the floor. Turning his attention to the woman, Lawrance found she had fainted. Taking her tenderly from the floor he laid her on the bed and gave his attention to her restoration. This was soon accomplished, and he saw before him the wreck of what was evidently once a beautiful woman, now wasted by disease and pinched with want and suffering. When she was able to speak, her first words were a plea for her hus-

band. Concern for him for the time obscured her gratitude and she stammered: "Please do—not hurt—my poor—husband. He is not himself—now. He was—a good husband—once. Drink has—brought all—this on us. Do not—have him—arrested, please. It will kill me if you—do. I shall—soon be dead—and out of my sufferings. But then—my boy—O my—boy! What will—become—of him?"

The boy had crept into the room in time to hear this last, perhaps venturing to do so because his father had in the meantime slunk out. He had stolen up to the bedside, and when the eyes of the mother fell on him, the question of his helpless, hopeless future took possession of her thoughts. She ended the words quoted with violent sobbing and a fit of coughing that told all too plainly the disease of which she was dying. The boy put his arms about her neck and buried his head in the pillow, crying piteously. All the pent-up fear and sense of wrong and dread of being left without his mother, the

only real friend he had ever known, found vent in the sobs that shook his tiny frame. All the terrible pathos of the situation dawned on Lawrance as he gazed on those two. He saw deeper into human misery in one minute than he had ever seen before. The scene was too much for him, and with a simple promise to send help, he went out. As he passed out, he saw the husband stagger into a low doggery not far away. His indignation was too great to consider what he ought to do, and he did not consider, but this is what he did: He walked straight to the door of the saloon, entered, laid a hand on each shoulder of the wretch, looking him straight in the face, shook him to make sure of his attention, and said through his clenched teeth: "Do you ever enter that door again, or speak one word to that woman who calls you husband, and I will break every bone in your infamous body, you rascal! I shall keep watch, and do you keep clear of those premises, do you hear?"

The fellow stammered assent, and Lawrance turned and left after notic-

ing two or three rough specimens of humanity in the saloon, who eyed him with astonishment.

He lost no time in sending some refreshments and reporting the case to the board of public charities.

This was the opening of a new chapter in his experience. He had seen, as through a window opened on another world, the world of vice and suffering. He had got one glimpse of the havoc of everything sacred made by the drink habit. Manhood dehumanized, womanhood trampled upon, childhood crushed, home despoiled, want unsatisfied, sickness untended, hearts broken.

He had scarcely seen the face of the lad, but the sound of his sobbing was in his ears all through the day, and the pale, sad face of the mother was almost constantly before his eyes. We may not further follow the history of these unfortunates now, only to say the mother soon died and the boy was lost in the crowd, for he was "only a boy."

It is so easy to lose sight of a boy.

All the world will sometimes do that till the boy comes out of his obscurity a criminal, and then he exacts his penalty for having been lost sight of so long. It proves, then, to have been a costly oversight. Had the charitable been called upon, they would have done almost anything in reason for the waif, but they were too busy with their own affairs to seek for a lost boy. In the great Judgment the eye will rest under as strong condemnation as the hand, for the eye refuses to see as much as the hand refuses to help. It is not only the priest and the Levite who pass by that are culpable, but that multitude who go another way to avoid the sight of suffering. "If I had only known" is a threadbare plea in abatement of guilt when the onus of the guilt is that we do not know. The pitying eye is as gracious as the compassionate hand. "He looked with compassion" was said of One who saw with a vision undimmed by selfish scheming and undazzled by present-day glory.

The miserable husband and father,

ity of his winning Dora, if he could discover his rival he would see what might be done to crush him. To this he would bend all his resources, and the thought of it gave him more than half the pleasure that complete success would have done. To such natures as his, crushing a rival is as sweet as winning a treasure. In making this discovery no time must be lost. But he was uncertain how to begin. With these thoughts running through his brain and driving out all others, as it drew towards noon he left his office and went out, he scarcely knew why nor where. He crossed the Clear Creek bridge and was in the country. The smell of grape-blossoms was in the air, and the merry sounds of spring were everywhere. To him there was little charm in nature at any time; less now, for his thoughts were on other things. Finding no pleasure in these scenes he turned back and stood leaning on the railing of the bridge, looking down into the stream, every stone and ripple of which held a memory for him.

Just then Ben drove his team down into the creek to water them, as was his custom before giving them their noon-day oats. He entered the stream below the bridge, and stopped in a few feet of Roswell, whom he had failed to observe. The thirsty horses plunged their noses in the cooling water, and Ben watched them drink with an enjoyment almost as great as their own, all the while whistling a merry tune, and drumming on the body of the dray with his heels. Something more like a smile than anything his face had worn since morning played around Roswell's lips as he looked at Ben.

"Hello, Ben," was the first cheerful intimation of his presence.

"I'clar to gracious, you mos' tek my bref away you skeer me so," and Ben's eyes began to shrink to their natural size, while his white teeth punctuated a liberal smile.

"That's a fine team you are driving."

"Yes, sir, dey sho' is er fine team. You des orter see um pull, do. Hit mek yo' har stan' on en', lak you dun seed a gos.' When I say de wu'd

sumpin got to brek, or dey gwine away fum dar."

"Do you believe in ghosts, Ben?"

"Now den," said Ben, shaking his head slowly, "you ax me pow'ful hard un. I ain't niver seed none, but ain't 'sputin' dem whut is seed um. Now dar's Tom Lucas say he dun an' seed his mudder walk roun' 'is bed three times one night des as plain as you sees yo' han' fo' yo' face an' dat after she been dead mo'n a whole year."

"I suspect Tom had been drinking too much; that sometimes makes people see things, I am told. If I were in your place I would tell Liddie about his seeing ghosts. Do you think she would like to have the ghost of her mother-in-law walking about the house?"

Here Ben's smile broke into a laugh, and between the ripples of good humor he exclaimed, "Now, Mars Roswell, whut you gwine say nex'?"

"Only that I think Liddie is a sensible girl and will not take up with that good-for-nothing fellow, if you set up to her in good earnest."

Another laugh, still heartier than before, and, "Dis nigger sho' gwine do whut'e kin. But how cum you 'spicion bout me and Liddie?"

Roswell saw the time had come for the main attack. He had skillfully touched all the chords but one, and he reserved that. After a brief pause he said, "By the way, Ben, some lucky man has been courting your young mistress, I suspect. Do you know who he is?"

"What mek you 'spec' dat?"

"Well, I think it likely that such a young lady as she is would have suitors, she is so attractive, and then I heard a rumor to that effect."

"You spoke de Lawd's truf, when you sed dat, fur Miss Dodie suttinly is a mos' 'stonishin' pusson. She dat gay an' happy an' jes lak a streak o' sunshine wherebber she goes; den agin she jes as calculatious as Ole Marster hisself, an' as independent as a woodchopper. Mammie say she jes as much lak 'er mudder whut's dead as one pea's lak anudder."

Roswell saw he had touched off a

vein of talk that was inexhaustible, and he broke in with the question on which he still had no light: "Do you happen to know who's courting her, Ben?"

"Well, you see, you can't mos' allus tell 'bout sich at dat. I can't 'zactly say. Whut mek you ax me dat?"

All this time Ben was in a pitiable state of perplexity. He remembered his promise to his mother, yet he could not see what harm he could do by telling this man a simple thing like that. Then he had conceived a liking for this man, whom he had always disliked heartily before, perhaps because his Mammie had disliked him.

"Oh, nothing in particular," said Roswell in his easiest way, replying to Ben's last question, "only I was curious to know, but if it's a secret you needn't mind." Here he took from his pocket a silver dollar and threw it in the bottom of the dray saying, "You've done me some good turns, take that and buy something for Liddie." Then he made a move as if he would turn away.

Ben's barriers gave way and he said, "Mars Roswell, I kin tell you all I knows, an' dat ain't a gret sight. Las' night at de party, Mars Lawrance whut keeps de books at de sto,' you know he was at de party, he was talkin pow'ful sof' to 'er under de big beech—you know de big beech by de front po'ch?—an' she pear to take it mighty well. All I hear 'er say was he mus' wait fur 'is answer till to-morrow night—dat's to-night, you know."

When Roswell turned away, Ben felt uncomfortable. Turning his horses' heads towards home, he drove up the hill, not whistling as merrily as when he came. Could he have uttered his thoughts this is about what we should have heard: "Wonder ef he's gone an' got 'ligion. Dat do mek folks pow'ful friendly, dey say. 'Spec' he gwine run fur office. I 'members when Mars Rubin run fur de repesent, he cum bowin' an' scrapin' an' axin de niggers how's dey craps. He ain't nuvver done it sence; least I ain't seed 'im do it."

He was awakened from his musings

by the voice of Aunt Lylie exclaiming, "What you dreamin' 'bout?" The horses had passed through the open gate into the lot. When he had unharnessed and entered the kitchen he threw the dollar that had helped ensnare him on the table, saying, "Dar's a present I brung you."

"Whar you git dat?" she exclaimed, "yo' wages dun an' put away in dat trunk an' you ain't gwine git it out tell you need it, nudder."

Without hesitation, Ben answered, "Mars Roswell gin it to me."

"What de name o' goodness he gibbin you money fur? Dat's a new wrinkle on my hawn, sho'."

Ben got badly choked at this point, and the conversation was interrupted by his coughing, perhaps fortunately for him. Guilt is a bad sauce, and a wrong is not easy to swallow.

After a brief silence, Ben asked, "Mammie, don't nobody git 'ligion 'cep' at meetin'?"

His spiritual condition was a source of perpetual concern to his Mammie. Many were the times, when he was

asleep, she had, to use her own phraseology, "rastled" in prayer for him far into the night. It therefore gave her great satisfaction to hear him speak of the matter of his own accord. Her answer was prompt: "Cou'se dey kin, honey. Some o' dese niggers think hit takes a heap o' noise to 'tract de Lawd's attention. But I 'lows he kin hear a whisper same as a shout. Dar was Ole Mistis, she was pow'ful quiet lak, but she had de witness all de time. An' one day Mars George an' Ole Mistis was readin' de Bible, it was Sunday ebenin', an' when I was passing de do' I seed um kneelin' down wid 'er arm 'roun' 'is neck; an' I knows dis, 'e ain't nuvver been de same no mo'. In dat room he dun an' hear de wud an' got de sperunce o' grace." Here the religious discussion ended, and it would not have given Aunt Lylie as much comfort as it did had she known the ground of Ben's question. Nevertheless, she had seized her opportunity, and was wise enough to sow the seed and wait. For sage and servant the heart hath the same

need the world over. War of creed and clamor of doubt can not hush its cry nor make it deaf to the answering message of love. That one message breaks itself up into the forms of human speech as the firmament of waters breaks into rivers, that it may flow in soothing and healing benediction through all the forms of human intercourse.

CHAPTER VIII.

GRANTLEY SHOWS HIS HAND.

Roswell Grantley found himself, when seated in his room after dinner, in a rather uncomfortable frame of mind. His imperious will, not accustomed to be balked, had met an obstacle that did not seem likely to give way easily. Moreover, he had received a wound in the most vulnerable part of his being, namely, his pride, that tyrannical master that had ruled him from his youth. That wound rankled still more when he discovered the, to him, despicable rival who dared dispute his right to the hand of Dora Melton. He was not a man to hesitate, least of all, under these conditions. It was evident that there was no time to lose. The wooing had not gone very far between Dora and Kenyon, that was plain. Mr. Melton knew nothing of it. Roswell had spoken to

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him only that morning. He had counted on sympathy in that direction. He had gone to Mr. Melton on the plea of asking permission to sue for Dora's affections, but really to secure his co-operation. He had shrewdly pleaded family relations, worldly advantages, had warned against a possible misalliance for Dora, and had even hinted as far as he dared that the firm of Melton and Ford could have unlimited indulgence (which he too well knew they needed) if his suit were successful. He had gone away from this interview with the very exasperating impression that he had made no headway, and that Mr. Melton was not the sensible business man he had always thought him. He had left that noble old man reflecting on his own courtship and his beautiful wedded years, and on the infamy of shrewd men of the world planning to make the happiness of an innocent girl a matter of cold business and colder social advantages and repeating to himself these lines from "Locksley Hall," as he sat drumming on the desk with his fingers:

"Cursed be the social wants that sin against the
strength of youth,
Cursed be the social lies that warp us from the living
truth,
Cursed be the sickly forms that err from nature's honest
rule,
Cursed be the gold that gilds the straightened forehead
of the fool."

Roswell thought over these events of the day as he puffed his after-dinner cigar. When the cigar was half finished, he threw it away, and turning to his table, wrote a note to Dora, and calling a servant instructed him to bring the answer to his office.

What we see is only half, and the lesser half, of the tragedy of life. The real battles are fought beyond the gaze of men. The mysterious alchemy of thought and feeling is the real heart of earth's histories. That which comes to pass on the visible stage, the coarse and clumsy movements of the flesh, is hardly more than the shadow cast by the soul as it passes whither it is bent. The soul of Roswell Grantley has taken its course; we shall see what shadows it casts.

Reaching his office, he found Mr. Ford, of the firm of Melton and Ford,

awaiting him. Nothing could have suited him better. It was further favorable to his plans that Mr. Ford, who was now the active member of the firm, had called to see him in reference to the extension of notes of the firm that were already past due to Grantley and Son, bankers.

Roswell is seated. Mr. Ford has arisen and is restlessly pacing the floor. It is evident that the latter is the more excited and undecided, while the former has the more nerve and has the advantage.

"I tell you, the thing must be done, Ford, and done at once. It is to your interest to be rid of him at once; and, moreover, it is to my interest."

"The deuce, you say. What does this mean? Can't you explain? He is the best man we have ever had, and I do not know the shadow of a reason for the course you suggest."

"Yes, you have one good reason. I have told you it was to your interest and mine, and I am not accustomed to speak without meaning, as you have reason to know. Suppose I have good

reasons for withholding, even from you, the grounds of my demand for the present. Can't you trust me? Is it likely that I should wish other than the fullest success to you at this time?"

"But, Grantley, this is so sudden, and seems so confounded unreasonable. Besides, the thing is not so easy. What do you suppose Mr. Melton will say to it? He has taken a decided fancy to the fellow. Then there is the question of a successor. What are we to do?"

"What must be done, can be, and I tell you this must be. You are not so in the habit of yielding to Mr. Melton. You know how to manage that. As to the successor, I was coming to that. There is George Winston, whom I can spare and who can be had for much less money, and he is thoroughly capable."

"But why such haste? Can't we wait a month and give the fellow time to think?"

"I tell you once more and for the last time that it must be done at once. There is no use to mince words. Will

you do it and keep my confidence, or refuse and—take the consequences?”

This last was spoken calmly, but in tones that left no mistake as to the meaning of the speaker.

Mr. Ford hesitated, took a turn across the room, then said, “Well, if I must, I must, but it’s a thing I don’t like to do. And see here, Roswell, you must not carry this thing of making demands too far.” The last remark, a kind of parting shot, a sort of salve to wounded independence. It was a mock defiance, a tribute of a weak nature to a stronger one, that always comes in late in the struggle—as if the thing had not been carried too far already.

At this stage a note was handed to Roswell. He opened and read it. The expression of his face scarcely changed; there was only a slightly perceptible tightening of the muscles, as of one making ready to meet an antagonist. He lingered over the contents a moment, then suddenly asked, “What hour do you get your mail?”

"At four o'clock we send for it," said Mr. Ford.

"Will you make sure that Kenyon gets a letter at that time?"

"Certainly."

"And will you have attended to the other before that time?"

"Well, yes, if you must have it so. Is that all?" in a tone of exasperation.

"Only this. Do not forget, and remember that Roswell Grantley never forgets. I shall depend on you."

CHAPTER IX.

A WAITING THAT WAS LONG.

Before receiving Roswell's note, spoken of in the last chapter, Dora had followed Aunt Lylie's counsel and told her father the whole story. He was not a little startled by it, but being a man of strong common sense and a generous nature, he listened with intelligent sympathy. She made it plain to him that her heart was committed beyond recall to Lawrance Kenyon. He withheld the cautions and protests natural to a fond father, for he saw that this child of yesterday was a woman to-day, and that her rich nature had felt in its depths the sway of a new power, for it was clear her heart had opened itself to love as a flower to sunshine. Moreover, he liked Kenyon, and was too sensible to despise a man for his poverty or his pedigree. He could do no other-

wise than yield to the tide that was setting seaward. He tenderly gave Dora his blessing.

The rest seemed to Dora easy. She was dreaming her dreams for the future, when she received the note from Roswell, and she answered it as follows:

DEAR SIR: What passed between us last night must be the end of an affair of which nothing can come. I have talked with my father, as you might have expected me to do, and we are agreed. This note must positively end all communications on the subject. With a full sense of the honor you intended to do me,

I am, sir,

DORA MELTON.

She took a grim pleasure in the cool tone of this note. There are not many forms of revenge permissible to a woman, but those in her reach are sometimes used with effect. She wished Roswell to understand that she took leave of him without the slightest hesitation, and that there was no ground for hope that she would relent.

This finished, she went to Aunt Lylie in a glow of excitement, and told the result of the talk with her father.

"I done tole you you mus'n't be oneasy. I knowed hit wus gwineter be all right wid 'im. You min' me o' de time whut I tole you 'bout when Young Mistis come to de qua'ters (she wus Young Mistis den) arter Ole Marster tole 'er she kin marry Mars George. I 'clar you mos' mek me furgit she ain' right here befo' me."

Things were moving beautifully. Dora had her father's approval, and she had finally disposed of Roswell. Her ship had crossed the bar, and it was only left to sail bravely on.

Lawrance would call on her that evening. She had no idea it was necessary to keep him in suspense, after the conventional fashion. She meant to obey the impulse of her heart and tell him all frankly. She would have counted it false as well as foolish to withhold her secret. She felt how happy both would be with a complete understanding. What would have

seemed to the conventional woman propriety presented itself to her mind as false and cruel. She was too noble to play the cat-and-mouse game and too guileless to pay tribute to caution.

She gave minute directions for the arrangement of everything about the parlor. She told Aunt Lylie she was going to have company in the evening.

"Who's a-comin'?"

"Why, Lawrance Kenyon, of course."

"Well, I 'clar to gracious, ef you don't beat all!" Then looking at the pretty face a moment, "But I spec' you's right. Ef I's in 'is place, I'd pull dat do' bell sartin an' sho. But you mus' 'member dat men's mighty oncertain critters. Dey may, an' den agin dey mayn't. You can't mos' allus count on 'em. Women don't hafter do nothin' 'tall but jes wait an' see what dey gwine come ter, an' sometimes dey gits mighty tired waitin'. Hit pears ter me lak de bizness sorter one-sided, anyhow. Ef a man want you fer a wife, all 'e got

ter do's jes march up an' ax you; but ef you dyin' fer a sight o' one o' dem lawds o' creation, you dasn't eber look in dat direction, but you mus' jes shet yo' eyes an' ten' lak you spise de ve'y sight of 'im.

"Now, dar's Rastus, dat's Ben's daddy, you know. He fus 'long ter de Lucases. De fus time I eber seed 'im I got mighty sot on 'im. Hit wus at de chu'ch. Mars George allus tuk we all ter chu'ch dem days when de suckit rider come eb'ry two weeks. Us black folks sot up in de gall'ry. Dem days niggahs know dey place. Dey wa'n't none o' dese high-falutin' notions dat dey gwinter be sumpin' 'sides what God made 'em, an' dey proud ter see dey white folks settin' in de fine seats on de fust flo'. De only trouble dem days wus we's allus 'sputin' 'bout who's got de bes' white folks. Our niggahs an' de Lucas niggahs use ter 'spute 'tween um right in de mids' er de meetin'. I 'member a fight 'tween our Pomp an' Lige Lucas. Hit was a Sat'day meetin'. Pomp was one dese loud-mouf nig-

gahs, what got more noise dan dey got brains, but he sot a heap o' store by Mars George an' Mistiss. He think dey de onliest people in de lan', an' 'e can' stan' to hear nobody say nothin agin um. Lige wuz de same way by his white folks. When Miss Mary Lucas cum in de chu'ch wid her mudder same as a queen, we all 'bleege ter say she was fine. Lige rar'd 'is head up an' gin' it a kin' o' shake, much as to say, 'dem's de sort o' people whut you read about,' an' sorter motion to'ds um wid 'is hand. Den when our folks cum in an' walk up de chu'ch, Pomp he make a sign to Lige, an' sorter open 'is eyes wide an' blow 'is bref hard, much as ter say, 'dem's folks what is folks.' When de chu'ch was out dey met an' gin to splavicate. Lige say Mars Lucas got mo' money an' mo' niggahs dan Mars George, an' in dat he was right; but Pomp 'low'd dat one o' Mars George's niggahs wuth two o' his'en, and as fur money, Mars George 'ud have a heap more'n 'e got ef 'e starve his niggahs tell dey look lack a ash-hopper. Lige

say 'e better be keerful how 'e talk, kase he ain' gwine tek it; dat Mars George was po' white trash an' his daddy dun tole 'im de Meltons was common blood. Pomp 'low dey mighty pow'ful uncommon side dem Lucases. Lige up an' 'clar' his Mars-ter's people cum 'cross de sea in dat ship what dey call de May Fly. Den Pomp say dat all dem May Fly people common as mud (do he doan' know nuttin 'tall 'bout it), but dat Mars George's was here 'fore de kentry was diskivered, for he kin to de Poker Hunters of ole Viginny; an' de May Fly people have to tek off dey hats an' ax um fo' dey can lan' dey cyargo.

"Frum dat, one word brung on 'nur till dey clinched fur a fight. Hit was at de back o' de chu'ch close to de grabeyard. By 'n by Lige cotch his heel on one dem grabe-stones an' fell flat crost a grabe an' Pomp on top on 'im. When Pomp seed whar 'e wuz he fotch a yell an' come a-climin', and Lige nuvver wait to git up, but cum

blippity-blip on 'is all fo's. Hit bruk up de fight."

"Mammie," broke in Dora, "I thought you were going to tell me about Rastus, and here you have launched into a regular volume of history."

"Sho' nuff, I dun clean furgot! Well, Rastus cum fum Lusianny. Mars Lucas tuck a lot o' cotton down to New Orleans, an' I hearn um say when he cum back he brung a mighty likely buck wid 'im. I's young den. De fus time I went to chu'ch I seed Rastus. I was singin' when he cum in an' sot down close to me, and when I seed 'im I didn't sing no mo'. He was lookin' straight at me wid a sort o' twinkle in 'is eye. I can' tell ef it mean mischief or dat e's jis axin' 'is-self who I is. Arter we cum home I kep thinkin' 'bout dat niggah an' de twinkle in 'is eye. Pomp keeps on sayin' 'Lylie, dat new niggah got stuck on you.' 'G'long,' says I, 'what I keer fur dat chap? 'sides how you know?' He said kase'e done tole'im, an' 'e wan' cum ter see me. I 'low'd

'e better go whar 'e's wanted; den I say keerless lack, 'When 'egwine cum?' Pomp say, 'Next Sunday.' De ve'y nex' day Pomp seed 'im an' tole 'im jes what I said, kase 'e wan' me 'isself, an' 'e hopin' Rastus won't come.

"De nex' Sunday arter dinner I fix up in my best an' waited an' waited. De niggahs keep a sayin,' 'Whut you thinkin' 'bout an' why you so spankin' fixed up?' But Rastus nuvver cum.

"Arter dat when I seed 'im I 'ten lack I doan wan' look at 'im. One Sunday our folks went out to Mount Zion chu'ch an' cyar dey dinner. De Lucases went too. Arter dinner I was gwine to de big spring down under de hill fur a bucket o' water, when Rastus cum up side o' me an' say 'Lemme cyar yo' bucket.' 'Co'use I can't 'fuse, an' de rocks so perlite to offer a cheer, we jes natu'lly sot down an' gin ter talk. De poplar blooms wusdrappin' thoodleaves, de bees wus a-hummin' 'mongst de trees, de spring branch wus a-singin,' an' a redbird come an' flipped 'is wings in it. All dis time Rastus wus busy brekin' a

stick wid his fingers. Toreckly he ax me whut mek me don' wan' 'im come ter see me. 'Who tole you dat?' says I. 'Pomp tole me,' says he. I tole 'im dat niggah wus allus puttin' 'is mouf in whar 'e ain' got no business. Den 'e ax me kin 'e come, an' I tole 'im I spec' so. De fus' thing I knowed, he wus axin' me ef I won' tek pity on 'im an' marry 'im, an' git Mars George ter buy him. He talked so sof' an' suadin' dat I mos' furgit myse'f an' le'm squeeze my han'. I tole 'im I see about it an' ax Mistis. All de time I know whut I gwinter do. When we got back to de chu'ch de summon wus done an' finished, an' I wus farly skeered. Ole Mistis sho'ly scole me dat time, tell I splain to 'er 'bout Rastus, den she ain' scole me no mo.'"

Dora listened with intense interest to the story of Aunt Lylie's courtship, which was so true to nature, and whose romance was so in keeping with her own state of mind. Having given directions about the arrangement of the parlor, a thirst for open air drew her out among the trees, where she seemed

as much at home as the birds and butterflies. There was a song in her heart, it was the song of hope, and it made her strong and glad.

The day wore away at last, and the night came, but it did not bring Lawrence as she expected. Her father remarked at the supper-table that Mr. Kenyon had left the store early, complaining of some indisposition, and this she accepted as explanation of his not keeping his engagement to call. She smothered her impatience as well as she might, and thought on the happy hour only a little postponed. She retired that night all a-flutter with the excitement of the day. Such a day had not been in her life before; no more would such a day be for her again.

When she awoke from sleep, it was to hear the clang of fire-bells, breaking the silence of the night with their rude alarm.

CHAPTER X.

FIRE BURNS MORE THAN HOUSES.

What an excitement to the nerves of a sleeping city is the cry of fire! All is wrapped in the death-like stillness of slumber, when suddenly the fire-bell startles the heavy silence with its discordant clamor. In an incredibly short time all is commotion, windows are alight, voices are heard everywhere, and the streets are all abustle with excited people.

Go to a fire to study human nature. Great things, heroic things are done there. There is an inflammability about men that makes them take fire at the sight of a burning building. They have a sudden and strong desire to do something noble. Men who can, without a twinge of conscience, sit at home and eat the bread earned by the drudgery of their wives, risk their precious lives for a trifle. "Oh,

the poor canary bird is up-stairs!" Suddenly a stalwart figure rushes through smoke and cinders and in a few moments returns with the frightened bird, amid cheers. To-morrow as to-day that man will contentedly look on while his mother builds a fire under the wash-pot where his own dirty linen must be boiled. It is much easier to be a hero to all the world than to one's valet, or one's wife or mother rather. And yet to be a hero at all is to be it to those who know us in the unending struggle of common life.

There are few people who will set the world on fire, and many, were it on fire, would never succeed in putting it out, but most, in the elevation and excitement of cosmic conflagration, would snatch a pair of worn-out shoes or other trumpery and straightway, with much turmoil and hot haste, toss them into the nearest volcano for safe-keeping; or, in the absence of such opportunity, would turn the lawn-hose on the moon to save it from the wreck. Men have been

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known to toss a two-hundred dollar mirror from a window in the second story, and tenderly carry a feather bed down in their arms—to carry a pair of andirons half a block away, and pile mahogany furniture only thirty feet from the flames.

On the night of which we are writing, about the time the town clock struck two, the fire-bell began to sound the alarm that waked Dora Melton from her slumber. She leapt out of bed and, throwing up the window, saw great volumes of smoke issuing from what seemed to her the immediate neighborhood of her father's store. Quickly calling her father, who by this time was awake, she informed him of her fear. As soon as possible he dressed himself and rushed out, to meet Aunt Lylie on the stairs coming in great excitement to tell him she had heard men passing say it was Melton and Ford's store on fire. It was true. The rear end of the large brick structure was a raging furnace of flame before the engines reached the scene. It was there

combustible oils and quantities of meat were stored. These fed the fierce flames and made all efforts to subdue them abortive. The wind set directly from the south and the building fronted the north, so that the flames were driven steadily forward in their destroying work. It soon became evident that the only feasible thing was to save the adjoining buildings.

Suddenly a cry of terror rang out from the crowd of onlookers. A gust of wind had swept the shroud of black smoke from the building, and a burst of flame lit up the east windows, where the building rose above the adjoining one-story structure. At one of the windows in the second story the white, horrified face of a man had been seen. He was making a desperate effort to get out. He broke the sash and strained with all his might at the iron grating that defended the window on the outside. The bars began to yield under the frantic efforts of the prisoner of the flames. One of the bars gave way and the crowd cheered. Just then

came a crash that made the building tremble, the scared face went down, and a great cloud of black smoke rolled up, shot through with jubilant tongues of red flame, much as the smoke and flames of the bottomless pit may be supposed to do when a lost soul drops into it. A stifled moan of horror, almost more a shiver than a moan, ran through the crowd, and they turned their sickened faces away.

Who could look calmly upon a scene like that? Some may behold property consume away that represents years of hard labor and strict economy, or even see works of art shrivel and parch into which the very soul of genius has wrought itself for the centuries, and remain unmoved. But a human being with his passionate clinging to life, with his nameless anguish when danger seizes him, his fierce clutching at hope, his terrific battle against the ruthless giant whose hot breath hisses in mockery, his cries, wild with terrible pleading, heard only by his own ears, his fond thoughts of light and fresh air and limpid waters

that all belong to the past, the surrender to despair, the anguish, the suffocation—that forbids calmness in the beholder. To see one hurled down from life by monster flames, in very sight of the stars, from gazing into the very faces of one's fellows, sympathetic but powerless to help, is a scene from the sight of which may a kind Providence deliver us.

Dora had commanded Aunt Lylie to go and see that no harm came to her father. She had just reached the scene of the fire, and in her search for Mr. Melton she had got as near as the intense heat would allow. She approached from the east, and was therefore in full view of the windows on that side. By the pavement she found a large box which had been rolled out of the adjoining building. In order to command a better view of the crowd, and, if possible, locate her master, she climbed onto this box, and balanced herself by the branch of a tree. This lifted her above the heads of the people and gave her a fine position for observation. She

hastily searched with a keen eye the sea of faces for that of Mr. Melton, but did not find him. She was about to get down, when a sudden gust of wind swept a cloud of smoke that way, and for the moment she was blinded. When the smoke had passed she lifted her eyes to the window at the moment the frightened face of the unfortunate man appeared. She did not hear the cry of the crowd, but only murmured "My Lawd!" and, shading her eyes with her hands, bent forward with an intentness that might belong to a tiger seeking its prey—or to a mother seeking her child. She was not lacking in the excitability so common to her race, and had she not been controlled by a more absorbing purpose, she would have probably lost her head and fled with a shriek. It is a well-known fact that when the mind is filled with a single aim it steadies the nerves and overrides the instincts. An artist may so far conquer pity as to paint the agony of a tortured victim. The scientist may be deaf to the cries of the helpless animal that writhes

under his cruel instruments, as he traces life's elusive secret along the track of tortured nerves. One who would faint at merest sight of blood may be so filled with the spirit of ministry as to move over a battle-field without quailing. Aunt Lylie was too intent on making sure of the man's identity to be deeply affected by thoughts of the dreadful fate to which he was exposed. When the crash came she turned away, and a beholder would have marveled at the look of satisfaction on her face. Just as she stepped on the ground her master touched her arm and said:

"Where is Dora?" When she saw he was weak and exhausted, she answered:

"She sont me arter you kase she's oneasy 'bout you, she wan' you ter come home." Without another word he turned and led the way home.

CHAPTER XI.

VANDALIA'S MYSTERY.

Two absorbing questions disturbed the current of Vandalia's thought next morning after the fire, questions likely to remain unanswered for many days hence. "How did the fire occur? and who was the unfortunate man who perished in the flames?" They were on everybody's lips. Every other subject was overshadowed by this one. Even the weather was not thought of and the health of the community was given a holiday. The morning paper was unread and unquoted, though it contained sufficient sensations to set all the nerves of Vandalia tingling and all her tongues wagging. As to these two questions almost every man had his own theory for which he was ready to contend, and we may as well add that as usual in such cases they were all equally false.

As early as possible Mr. Melton and his partner got their employees together and consulted with them as to the cause of the fire. Kenyon was not present. A runner was sent to his boarding-house, but he was not there and had not been during the night. Neither had he been to supper or breakfast. All of his belongings were in his room. No one could be found who had seen him since he left the store the day before. It was customary for one of the clerks to sleep in the store every night, as a protection against the lawlessness that prevailed at that time.

Lawrance always slept there at the first of each month, as it was necessary in posting up the accounts of the month for him to work late at night. All of which seemed almost conclusive that it was he who had perished. He was the only one who was missing, and that some one perished in the flames there were well-nigh a thousand eye-witnesses to testify. Who else could it have been? This very natural conclusion soon took posses-

sion of the multitude, and there was much sorrow at the tragic end of a life in which everyone could now find so many excellencies. Many who had never even by a kind look shed one ray of approbation on the path of Lawrance Kenyon living were ready to lavish extravagant praise on Lawrance Kenyon dead. It came with a heavy blow to the proprietors, especially so to Mr. Melton and for reasons with which the reader is familiar. His steadiness, competency, faithfulness and courtesy had won for Lawrance a warm place in the hearts of his employers and their regret was deepened by the belief that his life had been sacrificed in trying in some way to save the store. To all it was a terrible tragedy, and cast a deep gloom over the community.

Soon another view began to be discussed, set afloat by no one knew whom, but gradually spreading, as such things will, until it was in many mouths. It was that Lawrance had burned the store, or procured accomplices to do it, and that he had fled

from the consequences of his crime. That it was the work of an incendiary seemed certain, as there was no fire about the building at that season of the year. It was whispered that there was a motive in a recent affair of the heart in which Mr. Melton had interfered. Suspicious characters had been seen in the neighborhood at a late hour the night of the fire. Lawrance's strange behavior in leaving the store and failing to appear at supper were urged against him. It was doubtless one of his confederates who had been caught by the flames in a greedy effort at plunder. Lawrance knew the store too well to have allowed himself imprisoned in that way. He could have used the elevator, and the way of escape by the front door was open. The victim was one who was ignorant of the surroundings.

In a still lower whisper it was said there were those who knew things in his past if they cared to tell. Thus there are tongues that would rob even the ashes of a martyr of their sacredness, from whose venom there is no

escape even in the grave. No one seemed to know where this opinion originated; we can only guess where the motive lay to rob the memory of Lawrance dead of its purity, or despoil the name of Lawrance living of its honor. It is not so remarkable that such a conjecture could be set afloat, but that there could be found so many who would adopt it. The opinions soon became about equally divided.

When Aunt Lylie returned from the scene of the fire she hastened up to Dora's room and whispered something in her ear that made her start and turn pale, then it seemed to give her an assurance that comforted. She did not know all that had occurred at the fire. Aunt Lylie's hurried message had evidently contained some hint of the sickening horror. When her father entered he studiously avoided any allusion to that feature of the catastrophe. He was much depressed and shaken, and, though he strove hard to hide it for the sake of Dora, he could not quite succeed in blinding her loving eyes to the

fact that something more than financial loss weighed on his mind. He did not know that Aunt Lylie had seen the face at the window, and consequently had not cautioned her as he would have otherwise done against mentioning that matter to Dora. Of course the whole affair could not be long concealed from her, but he was moved by a father's desire to shield her as long as possible, and by the vague hope that morning might resolve his fears, though all efforts to find Lawrance that night were unavailing.

This is what Aunt Lylie whispered to Dora:

"It wa'n't Mars Lawrance whut got bu'nt, fur I seed 'im wid my own eyes."

After Mr. Melton retired to his room Dora eagerly asked for an explanation. This was Aunt Lylie's answer:

During the brief space in which the man at the window had appeared to her she had taken in all the details. She could have sworn to the following description of the man: He was broad shouldered and muscular. His

face wore a mask of grizzly beard. His hair was long and bushy, and over it he wore an old fur cap. His shirt was not by any means white, and he wore only a part of a coat, one half of a ragged sleeve dangling about his right arm.

That she saw so much while others saw only a startled face is no great marvel. She occupied a favorable position, at an angle also where the light favored clearness of vision. She was alert with a reason for making sure. She was seeing for Dora. She knew that Lawrance was likely to be there at the first of the month. She felt she must make sure. There are emergencies when the soul concentrates its powers in eye or ear, and apparent miracles of perception are wrought. Besides, the habit of minute observation belongs most to people of rude cultivation. Begging Aunt Lylie's pardon for the comparison, the lower animals have the power of sense perception far beyond man. It seems to be a sort of compensation in nature that where culture is denied

instinct is quickened, and keenness is proportioned to lack of breadth. Aunt Lylie would never have discovered the law of gravitation from a falling apple, but she would have known exactly the kind, size, and color of the apple. She would not have written the "Principia," but no more would she have cut two holes under the door, a large one for the old cat and a smaller one for the kitten. Her mind was not busied with a great variety of subjects, but it acted with lightning-like rapidity and almost mechanical accuracy on the facts that came within its narrow range.

Though Lawrance himself had not been seen, Dora was reassured by Aunt Lylie's recital, and, while the identity of the unfortunate man was a mystery on which she could not form a reasonable conjecture, she trusted the day would bring light for the solution of it all. She had not even thought of the possibility of Lawrance being accused of burning the store. She was spared that pain for the present.

What was her astonishment and

terror to learn next day that Kenyon had disappeared and no trace of him was to be found. This was something she had not thought of. If Aunt Lylie was right in her observations she had no doubt he would be at hand next day to answer for himself. But to learn that he was nowhere to be found filled her with the most unspeakable terror. After all, she thought, for once Aunt Lylie must have been wrong, else what had become of him? The fearful contemplation sent the iron deep into her soul. She tried hard to be brave, she tried hard to hope, but who could be brave, who could hope, in the face of such a condition? She was almost beside herself when this revelation was brought to her by Ben during the morning. Aunt Lylie led her into the house and sat down and talked to her:

"Now, honey, lemme tell you, Mars Lawrance ain' got bun't in dat sto'. Ain' I dun an' seed de man wid dese eyes, an' I tell you 'twan 'no mo' lack Mars Lawrance dan I'se lack yo' own sef, an' de Lawd knows dat's

sayin' a heap. 'Sides what mek 'im wan' git bun't when he knows ev'y crook an' turn in de house? Ef he cotch up stairs, how cum 'e can' cum down on de elevator fo' de fire reached it, or ef 'e can' do dat, 'e can go to de front an' motion to um, an' dey'd put up a ladder an' tuck 'im down. De man what got bun't wan' in dat sto' for no good, and he was a wantin' ter git out 'dout nobody seein' 'im, an' 'e look zackly lack dat sort o' cattle, as well as ac' lack it. Dat's de reason he doan go to de front whar dey a in' no fire an' holler fur he'p. Mek your min' res' easy 'bout dat, fur I done tole you an' I tell you agin hit warn' Mars Lawrance no mo' dan hit was you. As to whar 'e is I can't zackly mek dat out, but we gwine fin' out. We mus' be patient. De Lawd gwine straiten it out in 'is own time."

With wonderful skill Aunt Lylie had touched every hopeful chord in Dora's bosom. There was a force in her words and a contagious confidence in her manner, that were almost irresistible and Dora found herself

reassured. But it was a forbidding situation that faced her. The contrast between to-day and yesterday was great indeed. Then God seemed to caress her, now He was smiting. Yesterday her heart was delirious with joy, to-day it was wild with pain.

While she indignantly rejected the idea of crime, and while she could not believe it was Lawrance who met death in the flames, there still remained the fact of his absence. Where had he gone and why had he disappeared in that mysterious way? This question grew more and more perplexing to her as the days wore on and no trace or hint was found to throw any light on the mystery.

It was only little less a grief to her to believe he would leave her without a word after what had passed between them than to believe he had died with tender thoughts of her, and with that splendid fidelity to the heart that trusted him, which she had fancied he possessed. Her position was a trying one. She could not even inquire about him. His relation to her was

not known and had it been, the fact that he had thus deserted her without an explanation would have forced her to be silent. As she pondered these things the darkness seemed to thicken, and her heart ached none the less that she must hide its soreness. Through all she clung to the hope, even the belief, that her lover was true to her. She had a vague, half-formed thought that some one was in some way responsible for his disappearance; how, she hardly dared to even conjecture. She was like children who sit at evening and watch the shifting clouds, and build with their imaginations a thousand forms, never quite clear, always imperfect, but pleasing in their resemblance to well-known objects. Thus day by day the clouds of uncertainty lay heavy on the horizon of her thought, taking the changing shapes her fancy gave them. Nothing is so trying as perplexity, as a vague suspense, not to know the cause or nature of your trouble. To fold your hands and wait without even knowing how to set about resisting,

like one beset in the dark by foes whose weapons we can not even see, is a frightful position. Such was Dora's case. The nature of her trouble she did not understand, and she was forbidden by all the circumstances to attempt to either fathom or to remedy it. Did she know where Lawrance was she could not utter a syllable to call him back, or let him hear one sigh of regret.

CHAPTER XII.

ANOTHER VICTIM.

The days wore on, and still there was no light on the dark mystery. Everything had settled down to its old routine. Politics, health, and business had resumed their usual sway over the Vandalian mind. The affairs of life are entirely too urgent, its struggle entirely too intense, for the passing out of one man to long break the current. The breaking of one or more hearts in a community is not a matter on which men bestow more than a brief sigh or two. One of the most pathetic things in all life's tragedy is the fact that each must live his life alone; that each heart must bear its own burden, and scarcely an ear be found with time and patience to hear the story; and when at last the burden is laid down, those to whom we have been closest will chaffer and

trade and toil in life's common-place treadmill in very sight of the fresh mound above our silent breasts. We only see the surface of each other's lives, and just now and then the depths even of our own. But sin and sorrow never rest.

Two weeks after the fire, Ben drove his team down to the creek at noon and found Roswell Grantley standing at the same spot as before.

"Well, Ben," he said, after exchanging pleasant greetings, "how are things getting on at the big house?"

"Mighty bad, Mars Roswell."

"Why, what is the matter now?"

"Well, you see, Ole Marster, he been pow'ful trouble 'bout de fire, an' Miss Dory ain' lack 'ersef no mo'n ef she ain' de same pussòn, an' Mammie all de time worried 'bout um, an' hit doan' seem lack de ole place no mo'."

"What do you think has become of Mr. Kenyon?"

"I doan' know, sah," shaking his head. "Hit mighty cu'ious. I done an' stop thinkin'."

"Do you suppose he got burnt in the fire?"

"No, sah; I can't 'zackly make it out dat way, 'case Mammie seed de man what got bu'nt an' she say she know tain't him. 'Sides dey wa'n't no sign 'o him in de ashes, fur we sarched um keerful. Seem lack 'is watch or sumpin 'ud been dar ef 'e's bu'nt.

"Perhaps Miss Dora refused him and that made him leave the town, and perhaps burn the store, too." This was spoken with the inflexion of an interrogatory rather than a surmise of his own. In fact this was the theory Roswell was anxious to confirm. It was a palliative to his own conscience for the part he had played, to believe Lawrance capable of such a crime. The devil is a great sophist.

Ben shook his head again. He knew more than he dared tell. He only replied: "What fur she pinin' so den, ef she done an 'fused 'im?"

This conversation revealed to Roswell what he wished to gather, namely, the state of Dora's mind, and what the opinion was at the Melton home-

stead as to Kenyon's absence. Also it was news to him that Aunt Lylie had testified that Kenyon was not burned. He walked homeward pondering these things. He had by no means given up his hope of winning Dora, but was busy with plans for compassing that hope. Kenyon out of the way, if he could erase the noble picture from her mind or blur it with suspicion, time and skill would do the rest. He was patient as he was resolute, and as unscrupulous as patient.

Ben had promised his mother he would tell her whatever he heard about Kenyon. She had a vague belief that Roswell somehow had to do with his disappearance. She had caught at Ben's new partiality for Roswell as a possible means of reaching some clue.

So when Ben came to dinner he told her what had passed between him and Roswell, dwelling especially on the suggestion that perhaps the disappearance and the fire were to be accounted for by the fact that Dora had refused Lawrance. Ben would

have been startled had he seen at that moment the expression on his Mam-mie's face. After a minute's silence she asked in a tone that made him look quickly up:

"How cum he know dat Mars Lawrence cou't Dodie?"

This was unexpected. He had not thought but that it was an open secret. Time had thrown him off his guard. The weight of his guilty imprudence fell upon him with crushing force, and he blurted out the whole story of how he had before told the secret. Aunt Lylie did not wait for him to stammer his apology or ask forgiveness as he began to do, but stood over him, her eyes flashing and her whole form quivering with rage. Her strong hands clutched his shoulders with a force that almost sent her fingers into the flesh, and her hot breath almost burnt his face, as she poured a perfect flood of invectives on his devoted head.

"Ain' I dun an' tole you you musn't go tellin' what you seed dat night? Ain' you done an' promus' me you

won' tell? Den you tole it, an' sides you tole me a lie 'bout it. You de cause o' all dis trouble, an' you de chile what I brung up an' what I lub'd nex' to de lam' yander in de big house. Is it fur dis I done an' nuss you day an' night, an' brung you up to tromple on folks's hearts in dis way? Hit hu'ts me to see you. I can't never trus' you no mo'. Leab de house dis minnit, an' doan' you nebber set yo' foot in it no mo'." Pushing him from her, she pointed to the door.

Ben's face was ashen. He tried to speak but could only stammer. He could not see why his revelation was such a crime. And, the truth is, it played a very small part in the final result, but in Aunt Lylie's mind there was one subject dwelling, and it was but natural she should exaggerate everything connected with it, and that her feelings on that subject should be intense. Ben stood outside the door dumbfounded, stunned, and at a loss what he should do. He heard his mother say in a voice that he imagined was a little more subdued, "Wait."

Then she went in her own room, and soon came back with a bundle in one hand and a small package in the other. He did not see her for he was looking at the ground. She threw both bundle and package at his feet, then shut the door and burst into sobs—which he did not hear. The bundle was his clothes, the package the wages she had been saving for him. Ben's heart sank like lead now, for he knew that her decision was final, and if it had not been, he was too wounded to sue for peace, so he slowly took himself off, not knowing whither.

He loved everything and everybody about the place. There was not a tree in the neighborhood under which he had not played with his young master who was killed in the battle of Manassas. As he put his hand on the latch of the back gate he thought he heard his mother's voice. Perhaps she was calling him back. No; it was only the whine of the old dog, that crept out as if to sympathize. Ben hesitated. Perhaps if he should go back now his mother would relent, he

thought, and perhaps she would have done so, who knows? but he blindly felt he had been wronged. He knew she would suffer, and he was wicked enough to be willing she should, and so he raised the latch and went out. He chose his way across the horse-lot. He must bid adieu to Lincoln and Davis. At that moment Davis was devouring a bundle of oats in great mouthfuls in his clean stall, and Lincoln had walked out in the sun and was rubbing his nose against the gate. He greeted Ben with a low whinny and put out his head for a caress. Ben did not speak his greeting as was his custom, but drawing the faithful head to him he looked silently into the great kindly eyes. The horse seemed to realize something was wrong, as he gently rubbed his head against Ben's shoulder. As for Ben, the big tears were chasing each other down his cheeks. He could only murmur, "Poor ole Lincum, who's gwine to keer fur you now?" He went into the stable where Davis was eating his oats, and

laying his arm around the great, glossy neck, he found his voice.

"Well, Davis, I bleege ter leab you. You dun some clean, squar pullin' fur me many a time. I dun an' druv you all your natyal life. I 'members when I fus' brek you an' I ain' let nobody 'buse you. Don't you 'member when I whup Tom Lucas case he hit you wid er rock? I'd do it agin', old boy, but I can't be wid you no mo'. Ben's gwine fur away, an' he hates to leab you"—here his voice broke, and pressing his cheek to the shining neck of the noble horse, once more he picked up his bundle and started. Both horses followed him as far as they could and, as far as he could see them, stood watching him. "The ways of man are as inscrutable to a horse as the ways of God are to men." Long afterwards Ben remembered with sad pleasure the parting look of these two friends of his youth.

Aunt Lylie sat down and pondered. This was her hardest blow. Do we call it an unnatural 'deed? Let us remember this poor, passionate negro

had another love, and that, untaught though she was, she had a conscience. What it cost her to exile her boy we may not know, let us not try to guess. Conscience is a costly thing. She had simply laid her love for Ben on the altar of her duty to Dora. Had she failed in this proof of her devotion she could no more have held up her head. The deed was done, the shadows deepened on her path, but she did not waver.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE PRICE OF A MAN.

The Melton and Ford fire had been adjusted between the firm and the ——— Insurance Company, in which building and stock were insured. In this Roswell Grantley had figured conspicuously, because he held the policies as collateral for loans already past due, and had made it pretty plain that he would not allow further extension.

Very soon after the fire a lawyer representing the aforesaid company called on Roswell to settle these policies, according to an arrangement made between the firm and the company. After the business had been transacted, Roswell made sure that no one was listening, and introduced the interesting theme of the origin of the fire.

“Would you mind telling me what

you think of this fire?" he said, turning from his desk and facing the lawyer.

The lawyer was silent for a moment, either from professional habit or from a natural desire to speak cautiously and not hastily, then replied, "That there was no fraud we have all agreed. If there was ever any doubt on that score, it exists no longer. Then we are shut up to one of two theories, incendiarism or accident. I am inclined to the latter, Mr. Grantley. The facts point that way."

Roswell received this reply with that expression which means, "I know more than you can tell me," and when he answered it was as one who is confident of his facts.

"When you know the facts, you will reverse your opinion. If you will not divulge the source of your information, I will outline these facts to you and put you on the right scent. May I have your promise, Mr. Logan?"

"Certainly, what passes between us shall be a professional secret, and I shall thank you for your trouble."

"Oh, it is no trouble to talk of what interests one. This case interests me, and I fancy I have gone further into it than any other man." Roswell paused with eyes fixed steadily on Mr. Logan's face to see that he had his mind fully. The lawyer was interested.

"May I take down the facts you propose to give me?" asked Mr. Logan.

"I have no objection, if you think they will be useful to you. Besides, I will save you the trouble of asking a question by answering it now: the facts I shall outline can all be proven."

"Let us admit there is no direct proof of arson. We must look to the circumstances. These are: The fire began late at night, when there was least likelihood of its being discovered and extinguished; it began in the part most combustible and on the interior, pointing to someone who knew the building and had access to it. If done by an incendiary it must have been for cause. Men do not do such things without a motive."

"Slowly, please; I wish to be accurate," said Mr. Logan.

Roswell continued more deliberately:

"There is a man who fulfills all these requirements. This man has not been heard of nor accounted for since the fire. He was seen with some suspicious characters in a low dive the day before the fire occurred. None of these have been about town since the fire. One man was supposed to have perished in the flames. If anyone suffered that fate, it was not the man under suspicion, for he left the city that night on foot. Did he have a motive? Several: first, a love affair, and the sting of rejection; second, he had been discharged from the employ of the firm and received notice of it that afternoon; third, he was an adventurer who came into the community without character or antecedents, and there were funds to be had, and valuables to which he had access. You know to whom I refer."

There was a pause. The lawyer was deeply impressed. Roswell was

waiting for a reply. It came in the form of a question, "But why did this man fly? Did he not know that would be the means of fixing suspicion on him?"

"The flight was an afterthought," said Roswell. "Guilt is panicky. One's shrewdness breaks down under it and 'conscience doth make cowards of us all.' In the event of arrest, I am confident proof will be forthcoming which would convince a jury of his guilt."

"Why have you not interested the firm in this?" asked Mr. Logan.

"For the simple reason that I did not wish to be mixed up with it, and then besides there are reasons of a delicate nature why it could not be done. My suggestion would be that your company offer a reward for arrest sufficient to attract attention, and put men on the lookout all over the land. Such a measure would prove a good investment in deterring men from like crimes. To come at once to the gist of the matter, such is my interest in the case I am willing to

assist by paying one-half the reward, if it is made large enough."

"What would you consider large enough to reach the case?"

"No less than one thousand dollars."

"And you will authorize me to say you offer to furnish one-half that amount, if the company I represent will offer the remaining five hundred dollars?"

"I do. Only I am not to be known in it to any one but yourself. Do you understand?"

"Mr. Grantley, you have astonished me, both by your detail of facts, and by your unusually liberal offer, and I shall certainly recommend that course to my people."

"It is with you and them now, and if they do not choose to meet my offer, I shall give myself no further trouble about the matter."

When they parted, Roswell was sure he had carried his point. He had won the aid of a great corporation in crushing his rival. For if Lawrance was never arrested, the price on his

head would ruin his reputation. If he were arrested, and not convicted, the very fact of a criminal trial would brand him with infamy enough.

CHAPTER XIV.

A WAIF AND HIS STORY.

Dora was one day called upon by a boy the fashion of whose clothing, the quality of whose manners and the flavor of whose dialect bespoke his citizenship in the great outer world of the homeless. They presented a curious contrast, those two, as they stood in the door, he speaking earnestly, she listening intently. His errand was one of mercy. In brief, there was a sick boy in a hovel not far away without food or friends or physic. He had tossed and raved the whole night about his mother, who was dead. This boy alone had watched by him and done what he could, and had come for her because he could do no more. Would she come with him? There was the accent of sincere pity in the voice and genuine pleading in the eyes of this child of nature as he plead the

cause of his "pal" in quaint speech, that was eloquent to the ears of Dora, because her ears were eloquent with sympathy. Would she go? The reader has already answered for her. She had become accustomed to the noisome air of the alleys, and scenes of wretchedness were familiar to her eyes, for her heart had been schooled to pity, and her feet had learned to follow the feet of the Lowly One.

Soon she found herself in a rude shanty, dirty, and destitute of the barest comforts, the way to which she had found paved with broken bottles, ash-heaps, tin cans, with now and then a still less æsthetic object. In a corner on a scant pallet lay a boy of something like a dozen years, burning with fever, and striving to make out with his wild delirious eyes what it all meant, as she knelt by his side. It awoke all the pity of her heart to see him struggle with the tangled thoughts and confused images of his fevered brain, uncertain whether Dora was his mother come back to him, or a witch blowing hotter the fires in his blood, or an an-

gel come to carry him to his mother.

There is that in a gentle woman's touch that is more than medicine, and as Dora's caresses fell soothingly upon his aching brow, and as her voice fell like a caress upon his ear, the rebellious, distressed nerves began to grow calm and intelligence began to rally. In a short time, by the aid of a simple stimulant, and a little nourishment that Dora had thoughtfully provided, the sufferer was calm and able to talk. By the aid of the other boy, a story was told that is the story of thousands, but none the less pathetic because so often repeated. A drunken father, a patient mother, a helpless child, the grind of a relentless poverty. At length death kindly relieves the mother, but leaves the helpless boy and the brutal father. Then follow hunger, cold, cruelty and life on the streets, with its scramble for bread. Then desertion by the father, which is the first blessing that shows God has not entirely forgotten, then after awhile sickness, which promises death, and that is the second sign that God is in

his world; and a third token that he is counted with the sparrows still is the coming of Dora.

It was a pitiful story, told in broken, hesitating speech, with such pathos in the big, fever-bright eyes and such pleading in the childish tones, that it won from Dora a shower of sympathetic tears. When the poor boy spoke of his sickness, he said: "I guess I'd been dead ef it hadn't been fur Ned," looking toward the boy who had piloted Dora. "He's give me most all he's arnt fur a week, an'—" Here Ned broke in with.

"Oh, shet up, Chris. 'tain't nothin'. You'd a'done it fur me," and he walked to the door to hide his tears.

"'Tain't ev'ry boy what 'ud give a good-fur-nothin' like me his last crust an' bring him water an'—"

"What d'ye take me fur," was Ned's impatient interruption, "a rhinoceros or a hotmetot? Ain't you got no gumption? Anybody 'ud do it, 'an ef you don' stop that gab, I'll quit you an' you can go to Ginny." These words were spoken with emphasis, and

a quiver of pride amounting almost to indignation, which was only Ned's way of saying in his untaught fashion that he did not wish his good deeds paraded. Here amid squalor and wretchedness, amid ignorance and coarse speech, were the fine, beautiful things of human nature. On one side a sense of gratitude, deep and genuine; on the other, a spirit that could empty itself in noble deeds and then resent open praise with as firm a self-abnegation as ever graced a saint. Rare sweet flowers sometimes bloom in unexpected places.

Dora saw, with a woman's intuition, that the impress of a good mother had been left upon the sick boy. All the beauty of his soul flamed into view, as he spoke of that one who had watched and protected and shielded and soothed him, till the storm had beat out her life. When he closed his story, he looked at Dora with grateful eyes, and said, "I wish she could see you kneelin' down here by me." In no other way could so much gratitude be expressed in so few

words; in no other form could so great a reward have been given for this ministry. Who knows what "eyes do behold us, out of eternity's stillness," and what mother benedictions fall on the heads of those who minister to their offspring?

Dora left that cabin with a sense of joy in her heart, of a sort she had never before known. For counsel she went to Amelia Bramwell. These two were as twin spirits. They had formed kinship in mutual sorrow and the friendship of earlier days was sublimated and sanctified by suffering.

Amelia belongs to nature's true nobility. She was a member of that noble army of heroines who helped to make the annals of her time and section illustrious. The story of their heroism will not be written, who out of the lap of luxury leaped to the side of their conquered brothers of the Southland and joined them in that new struggle in which they were destined to win such splendid triumphs. We of the South have here and there erected a monument to the memory

of those who went to the front and gave their lives for a cause to them none the less sacred that it was lost; but to her whose devotion and faith sustained them in the field, and whose courage and patience were the impregnable bulwarks of the home while the war-cloud hovered over the land, and who, when peace came to her desolated country, refused to repine, but whose voice whispered hope and cheer as she put her arm about the bronzed neck of the returned soldier and turned her smiling face to the future—to her we build no monument. It is well. Earth grows no material that can adequately symbolize her heroism, and praise, the most eloquent, is as sounding brass. The lasting achievements of a generation proclaim her worth, and the triumphant chorus of progress is her praise, who cheerfully exchanged her silks for homespun and the drawing-room for the kitchen, but kept still untarnished the crown of queenliest womanhood, and by her sway over the hearts of her

chivalrous subjects led them on towards the new day.

Amelia Bramwell was brought up in luxury. At the close of the war she found herself face to face with poverty. Suddenly the new and unstudied problem of self-support confronted her with its grim question, "What will you do with me?" She did not hesitate. Though the problem was complicated by the needs of a father old and broken in health, she did not waver. By her own exertions she eased the steps of her father to the grave. Then there came into her life another love, then a bitter loss, a disappointment to which we have already been introduced. She could not live for herself, her nature was too fine, her faith too high for that. Forbidden to love one, she loved all; robbed of the love of one, she won the gratitude of all. When the even current of a life is turned from the smooth channel it has chosen for itself, it is often that it may deliver its force upon the wheels of progress, or make the desert wastes to burst into bloom.

It was so with her of whom we write. The sweetness of her bruised life was set free, and the desolate were made glad by it.

Thus the lives of these two had been united in good deeds. They together became the friends of the friendless. Through storms of ridicule they had together marched to the rescue of the waifs of the street. They had gathered them into a night school and were brightening their dark lives with the radiance of womanly pity. They soon began to discover among these outcasts the stuff of which men are made. Kicked and cuffed by society, clubbed and arrested by the police, cursed and beaten by drunken fathers, driven on the streets by poverty to earn a penny where they might, or starve, or steal, they could hardly be expected to grow up beautiful or wise. There was no beauty in their world until it came to their astonished vision through the lives of these two; no wisdom spoke to their hearts until it spoke in the mellow, pitying tones of these messengers of Heaven.

Robbed of all the tender and affectionate influences of home, touched only by the hard and forbidding side of society, lured to vice by every voice to which their ears are familiar, and no one to call them back, or speak kindly to them, it is as likely they would grow up to virtuous citizenship as that pineapples should grow and ripen in the regions of perpetual ice. But when the voice of maidenly pity fell on their ears, and the light of a pure Christian character threw its splendor over their lives, something awoke in them that had not been awake before. It was as when Spring with its warmth and song breaks upon the barren earth; the beauty began to bloom in their lives. What those two did can be done again. If Christian people saw this world with the eyes of Him of Nazareth, if they touched it with His helpful hands, how beautiful it would grow; but, alas, if while we write our names on the cross, we live in the banquet-hall, if, while we subscribe to the Sermon on

the Mount, we live only by the ledger, the world will perish before our eyes and we with it. It is our shame that we can chaffer and trade and dance and drink with indifference while the face of the pitying Christ looks out of His Heaven—nay, looks at closer range, on vast multitudes who have never had a fair view of His unveiled beauty.

Ned, to whom we have been introduced, was one of those who had fallen under the influence of Dora and Amelia. It was this that led him to call on Dora for help when he could do no more for his friend. The result of it all was that Chris, the sick boy, was comfortably removed to the house of an old lady who lived alone, and who, for small pay or no pay, was always ready to do a turn for her kind. She was a motherly, gentle soul who kept on her own way and lived by quilting, sewing, nursing and the like, always coming up from her obscurity when there was need for her services. She was known far and wide as "Old

Mother Gray." She readily and cheerfully took the poor boy to her humble home and great mother heart to nurse and care for him.

CHAPTER XV

THE WAIF HAS A SECRET.

There was a knock at the door. It was a timid knock, and the door was heavy, but the quick ear of Dora caught the sound and she answered it herself. To her surprise it was Chris. He was pale and perhaps his hesitation was caused by weakness partly, but more by timidity. Dora's cordiality reassured him, for she was delighted that he should come to see her at home. He had recovered rapidly. Mother Gray had yielded her heart to him, and with it a very efficient hand, and Dora had seen that nothing was lacking to promote his recovery. He had entered a new world, a fairy sort of world—not that he knew anything of fairies—but it was a world so utterly different from anything he knew that he scarcely recognized himself. While Dora was hiding her blight and

sorrow underneath her service to him, she was also overlaying the blight and waste of his life with hope and courage. What further she was doing when she preserved his life she had yet to learn, but her heart was glad with the great gladness of a noble deed, when she looked down into the face of this boy with life creeping back into it, and a new light dawning in the sad eyes washed so bright with tears. He sat on the edge of a chair, his ill-fitting, unpolished shoes pointing their toes at each other in very riot of awkwardness, twirling his worn and soiled cap on his hand. Every tone of Dora's voice was like a caress, and his courage grew in her presence. He managed at length to get his story told; brief, but telling volumes to Dora.

"You see, Ned, he tol' me you knowed Mr. Kenyon, whut wint away. The way he found out wuz, he wuz a-fishin' under the bridge one day after the store got burnt and he heerd Mr. Grantley, whut runs the bank, an' the nigger Ben a-talkin' about you an' him an' the fire. Ned told me sence

I been sick, an' you wuz so good I come to tell you."

Dora could hardly wait for him to stammer through his message. He was transformed. He was rapidly becoming a hero. She drew her chair nearer and asked eagerly. "Did you know Mr. Kenyon? What else can you tell me about him?"

He went on, quickening his speech under the contagion of her eagerness: "Yes, I knowed 'im. He wuz good to my mother. He kept my pa from hurtin' her one time, and got us help and medicine, an' I liked 'im. The day 'fore the store got burnt I wuz at the bank, cos I had been an errand for one of the young min. I heerd some min talkin'. They called Mr. Kenyon's name and I listened close then. I didn't 'zackly understand, but it seemed like there wuz sumpin' wrong, an' Mr. Kenyon wuz ter be sent away fum the store. When the man cum out I see it was Mr. Ford an' the other was Mr. Grantley. I 'lowed to myse'f I would tell Mr. Kenyon 'bout it, but I never seed 'im

to speak to 'im no more. That night when I was goin' by the house where 'e boards, I seed 'im come out an' go down the street. He was changed an' had on ol' clo's an' all that, but I knowed 'im an' I follered 'im, thinkin' I might speak to 'im ef 'e stopped. But 'e niver stopped 'cep' whin 'e come to this house, then 'e only stopped a minute, an' wint on out o' town. That wus long 'fore the fire, an' 'e ain' niver been seed in Vandalia sence that. I thought you mought like ter know."

Dora enjoined secrecy on him, and testified her gratitude by a caress and a kiss on the pale forehead. He never forgot that hour or that kiss. Memory came back to them in many a dreary aftertime as to a fountain of strength and encouragement. Twilight had fallen when he went out.

He left Dora with conflicting emotions in her heart, emotions that grew more turbulent the more she thought on what she had heard. It was news of a coveted sort from a wholly unexpected source. It brought gladness,

that Lawrance was alive and that there was proof that he left before the fire. It brought sadness, that he was wandering somewhere, the victim of a plot she could not yet comprehend. It made her indignant almost beyond control that he should be thus imposed on, and what pained almost as much was the fact that he had yielded and had not turned to her. With these emotions, she sought Aunt Lylie. When that faithful old darky entered her room, she found her young mistress lying on the bed convulsed in a fit of weeping. That did not happen often, but often enough to occasion no alarm to Aunt Lylie, who quietly sat down and stroked her hair and hands, asking no questions and offering no protests. The fit of weeping gave place to a troubled sleep, and Aunt Lylie watched through the restless night of tossing and moans that were ominous of fever. In the morning a doctor was called, and pronounced her case one of serious nervous derangement. He insisted on absolute quiet and, as soon as possible,

change of scene. It was the final result of a long nervous strain, to which was added this new revelation, and she had given way under it. The doctor charged it to her good works, and declared she must give up the Utopian idea that she was called to make all bad boys into good ones, not knowing it was that very thing that had so long sustained her and enabled her to fight off the inevitable.

It was two weeks before she could sit up, even in bed, and she had not yet mentioned the subject next her heart, even to Aunt Lylie. Among those who came to inquire, none were more solicitous than the boys who had felt the uplifting touch of Dora and Amelia. There was one in particular who never missed a day with his anxious face and faltering voice. When he had luck and could afford it, he now and then brought a bunch of flowers. Once he said timidly, as if he were not sure he ought to say it, and yet must say it, "Tell 'er I ai'nt said nothin' an' I ain't a-goin' ter."

Faithful Chris, with thy hard life

and thy rough speech, thine is as knightly a heart as ever beat. When Dora heard that message, she knew whence it came, and a tear trembled in her eye.

The new hope in her heart hastened Dora's recovery, even as its sudden coming had caused her sickness.

On one Sunday morning she was sitting in her bed, looking almost as white as the snowy linen that surrounded her. She was brighter, almost cheerful now. Aunt Lylie had done her best to put everything at its tidiest, and when Aunt Lylie did her best, there was not much margin left. The curtains hung with the right curve, the shutters let in just enough of the summer sun, which fell in two diagonal lines of gold across the carpet. The canary had been brought in and was singing softly from his position in the bay window. A bunch of flowers, this time the combined purchase of the pennies of "the boys," rested on the marble-topped center-table in a vase supported by a bevy of Cupids in a patch of silver daisies.

It had been sent up by the hand of Chris, who began to be acknowledged as the rightful agent of all their little attentions. Boys who were counted among the incorrigibles a few weeks before, and whose names were still fresh on the dishonorable roll of the police court, had clamored for representation in this floral tribute to goodness of heart. They were crowning their deliverer, laying their spontaneous offering at the feet of this queen of noble deeds. It was gratifying to Dora, but to Aunt Lylie it was more. It made her radiantly happy to witness the evidence of the power her young mistress exercised over the hearts of these young savages. It was to her a new proof of the high qualities she almost idolized herself. Her face was like the morning, when she said to herself, over and over, "I allus knowed dat chile wus er bawn queen."

This Sunday morning, Dora told Aunt Lylie all of what Chris had told her, which she remembered word for word, though everything else in con-

nection with that evening was vague and shadowy. The old negro listened with breathless attention, only interrupting now and then to exclaim, "Dat's whut I dun tole yer, honey," and, "Jes' whut I 'spected." In truth, the discovery only confirmed what she had suspected all along. The next keenest pleasure to being able to say, "I did it," is to be able to say "I told you so." Aunt Lylie fell back on the latter. The only drawback to her pleasure in having her opinions confirmed was the fact that another had the honor of finding out and revealing the facts. She had some of that pride in her achievements so common to our kind, and was just a little irritated at being for the once forestalled. Fortunately, she had none of that meanness that made her either discredit another's service or cherish jealousy of a rival.

What was to be done? That was the question of all questions now. If Lawrance could be found, if things could be explained, all might yet be well. But how? Where was he?

Aunt Lylie was at her wits' end, but her faith did not forsake her. "I dun tole yer we gwine fin' 'im, an' I ain't gib in. We gittin' more light. De Lawd's leadin' us thoo' de wilderness, an' he gwine keep on leadin' us, twell we reach de promus land. Sumpin in here" (laying her hand on her breast) "keep tellin' me I gwine see yer bofe happy wid dese eyes, den I gwine shet 'um and go long whar Ole Mistiss is."

There was something so simple and positive in Aunt Lylie's faith that it had a soothing effect on Dora. To-day she entered into it more than usual, and was strengthened.

CHAPTER XVI.

“LET THE STRICKEN DEER GO WEEP.”

When Lawrance parted from Dora under the beech on the night of the lawn party, he took his way across the grove, scarcely knowing whither he went. The moon was climbing the eastern heavens and pouring her silver light on the path as he walked. The grove was almost a forest of maples and box-elders and beeches. Moonlight in May, a lover among the trees, even alone, is not an inharmonious combination. Since Dora knew his mind all the rest of mankind was a contemptible audience, and the heart of nature alone a fit depository for the delicious secret of his love. Never before had he realized such an affinity between the soul and its surroundings; never had nature shown herself so glorious. He felt a strange uplift of soul. The future lay luminous before

his eyes. Dreams of high things began to awake the latent ambition of his heart. There are powers in all men that some voice will awaken, and when that voice speaks they do their best. Woe to him who does not respond with his might when that which is best in him springs into being. There was only one voice that could arouse the whole noblest manhood that in Lawrance Kenyon had hitherto lain dormant, and that was the voice of love. Having heard that voice he was as one who wakes from a dream. What flashes are these that unveil the angel within us, and redeem us, if only for a moment, from the mean and sordid domination of the flesh! Alas, that they can not endure!

The brief space spent with Dora on that night had been the birth-hour of Lawrance's nobler self. He had gone to the party with no definite intention except to see Dora, to look upon her beauty, to be near her, as moths get near a candle, perhaps to suffer like them. When he met her under the

beech, his secret would out. He spoke by instinct, as one cries out when struck. His words were hardly more than heart-throbs. By just so much they were eloquent and also few. Trust a woman to recognize the depths from which language comes. It is this depth which gives more meaning to broken phrases than was ever packed into the fine sentences of the rhetorician. Dora had said almost nothing, but she had listened with that unmistakable sympathy that can not be simulated, and that says plainly, "I am glad you spoke so." The spoken word is not the highest form of expression. There is a language which words can not compass, beside which halting syllables are contemptible. Lawrance had heard that unspoken language and was content.

He had not intended leaving the party so abruptly, but had withdrawn to enjoy his exquisite secret alone. Almost unconscious of any purpose, he held on his way into the street. He soon found himself on the bridge, leaning on the railing, looking down

at the reflection of the stars in the clear water, listening to its low murmur, and meditating on the excess of happiness that seemed within his grasp. At that moment, Roswell was making his declaration to Dora, and she was speaking those brave words, and keeping the thought of Lawrance in sacred contrast to the man before her.

The next day found Lawrance full of the one thought, and with a less steady hope than the night before. The day seemed long and tedious till the hour arrived when he was to see Dora.

He was standing at his desk when a letter was put into his hands. It was late in the afternoon. As the reader suspects, he had already received his discharge, and was rankling under the sting of injustice and trying to conjure up some possible excuse for it, for no satisfactory reason had been given him. But this discharge was none the less positive and final. He was in no mood for this second blow about to fall with cruel force. The letter he held in his hand was the

curt refusal of Dora to receive a visit from Roswell Grantley. Since the note contained no name, it lent itself readily to fraud. Roswell had mailed it to Lawrance. One could wish as he holds it in his hands that the dumb lines could speak and tell their secret, but alas, that ink should lend itself as readily to falsehood as to truth. He broke the seal, and the first sight of its contents sent the blood from his cheeks and staggered him as a physical blow would have done. His bosom heaved like the bosom of one in his death-throes. With his hands he hid his eyes from those terrible lines as one might shut out the sight of his own grave if it yawned before him. Then, steadying himself, he read it through deliberately, every cruel word piercing his heart like a dagger. Then, mechanically closing his ledger, he left the store and went to his room.

In such moments one wants to meet the gaze of no human eye. He must be alone, he must think, he must somehow choke down this agony. A great

wall of darkness rose before him. He could see no way through it. He entered his room, laid his arms across each other on the table, and dropped his head on them and grappled with despair. There as the twilight gathered about him, as if in pity to shroud him with its shadows, was fought one of those Titanic struggles waged on the lone and voiceless stretches of the human soul, in which destinies are made or marred. For this man there seemed nothing for which to fight. All for which he had learned to hope or live had gone from him. He saw no point at which to begin. Dora's note was final, cruelly final. The discharge he now understood. It was part of the plan to prevent his marriage with Dora, and the very dregs of the bitter cup were put in by her own hand. It was growing dark when he arose, and one look at his face would have told he had lost the battle. He was in that frame when men do desperate things. The moral forces were in abeyance. Had he known, had the phantoms taken

human shape, he would have shown himself cruel and men would have called his cruelty courage. But who could stand against fate, against the universe of darkness?

He proceeded to disguise himself by means of his razor and some old clothes he had at hand. The disguise completed to his satisfaction, he sat down again. He must write Dora a farewell letter. His heart was stabbed to the very core. His pride was wounded by the curt tone of her note. He could not understand it. If she must reject him, what need was there she should do it cruelly? It was a contradiction of all he had known or dreamed of Dora's character. He read and re-read the note. There it was, in cold, cruel characters before him, and though his soul bled at the smiting of every word, he could not change it, nor find in it that which was not there. He wrote. Page after page was flung rapidly from his trembling hand. His very soul seemed to run out in molten thought from his pen. This gave him relief. What

did he write? No matter. He read it, then tore it, and thrust it into the blazing fire, and the message that would have kindled a flame of light in the heart of Dora shriveled and hissed and fell into ashes. As Lawrance watched it, he seemed to see a symbol of his hopes, and the fire of his disappointment turning them to ashes. After the paper had ceased to burn, and the white ashes broke and fell or flew away, behold, one word stood out clear and vivid still, as if refusing to yield to the destroyer, and he beheld in the glowing embers, as defiant as the passion that survived the wreck in his heart, the word "*Love*."

He went out, and went worldward. He paused once, and took one long look at the beech under which his first and only eloquent words had been spoken, then took his weary way southward. How rapidly this all had come to pass! How much the human heart can enjoy or endure in a short time. The soul has no calendar; heart history is not measured by clocks. It

seemed to Lawrance an age since this tragedy began. When he turned away from that gate, and bent his steps towards the great world, the most careless observer, had he met him, might have said ever after, "Once I saw the face of despair."

His purpose, if he could be said to have one, was to quit Vandalia forever, to lose himself and his identity, and sever his past as far as might be from his future. As to the practical question of what use there was in such a course, he was not in a mood for asking or answering questions of any sort. For him there was no longer any good to be sought after, only evil to be fled from. Perhaps if his mind could have been sounded there would have been found a vague idea that he could somehow get away from his past by this course he had taken. He had not reflected on the solemn fact that there is no road leading away from self, and that memory defies all distance. He did not know where he should go, only away, anywhere, so it was far. He was as a wounded deer

trying to flee from the pain and carrying the pain always with it. He thought of all the ties that bound him to the past, except one, and there was not a spark of regret. When he thought of Dora the only pang of which he was capable shot through his heart. All friendships, all attachments, all passions, were swallowed up in his love for the fair, sweet girl he had so lately felt was his own.

He tried to find consolation for himself in anger. He summoned his pride, his resentment, to stand between him and his pain, but one swift vision of the radiant face of Dora, and his defenses gave way before his pitiless grief.

Then came the thought of God, and his soul rose up in bitter rebellion. He recalled having struck a boy once, because he held a poor fly struggling on the point of a pin for his amusement. Was it possible that the Great God would impale one of His creatures on a cruel disappointment and watch him writhe in his agony? He had not been wicked nor cruel. He

had many a time released a poor struggling moth from the chimney of his lamp. He would always step over a worm in his path rather than crush it. He had often readjusted the nest of the field-mice when disturbed by his plow. He had broken the sassafras-bushes in the fence-corner to cover the hatching brood of a mother quail when the reapers had wrecked her golden roof. He would not inflict on the vilest wretch, though he were his bitterest enemy, the pain he was now enduring. These were the thoughts that filled his mind as he trudged along through the night. For the first time the horror of doubt laid its chill touch on his spirit.

Thus on through the night, the sombre night, the curtain of whose darkness hides so much sin; the silent, lonely night, whose starry canopy covers so much of unwritten tragedy, this wanderer tramped alone with his pain. He did not keep to the highway, but tramped across fields and woods, always keeping his course southward.

Daylight found him in a dense wood, seated on a log, weary with his night's long tramp. He had not slept for two nights. The winds had piled the leaves into a friendly heap on the north side of the log on which he sat. He threw himself upon this bed of nature's making, smiling as he thought of occupying so delightful a resting-place without even so much as taking off his boots or saying, "by your leave." His sleep was long and deep. The sun was high in the heavens when he awoke. The woods were full of melody. The breath of grape and alder blooms filled the air. The scene was one of peace. A mischievous squirrel eyed him suspiciously, from the trunk of a large chestnut-tree where he hung, head downwards, barking with an energy that communicated itself by rhythmic movements to the proud tail that lay gracefully along his back. Drumming on a dead stump near by, was a woodpecker, whose fiery head flashed to and fro with amazing rapidity as he

industriously drilled his way into the yielding wood. Far away, the liquid notes of a brown thrush came, mellow, clear, far-floating, and with that oily softness that belongs to no other earthly sound. As Lawrance listened, the notes seemed to come from farther and farther, as if out of the bosom of a limitless forest, and the singer seemed to gather up and express the message of all the silent waste of woods, as if every leaf and flower and gurgling stream spoke through one throat, and every bird had whispered its loves and griefs into that one song. Rousing himself from his revery, Lawrance determined to follow the song and find its author, and struck boldly out for a long walk. He had not gone twenty paces, when the song suddenly broke off, and at the next step, the startled musician fluttered out from the thick foliage, almost in reach of his arm. While laughing at himself for allowing this wizard of the forest to play such a prank with his sense of distance, he

heard another sound and, looking down, saw at his feet a sparkling spring, breaking forth from the rocks and laughing itself into mimic cataracts and rapids, as it began its long journey to the sea. Then it dawned on him that he was thirsty, very thirsty, and throwing himself on his face, he drank from Nature's full tankard. When he arose he bethought himself he was hungry, and taking from his pocket some cheese and crackers which he had provided, ate and was refreshed, and there came to him a temporary sense of peace. He who fled from the companionship of men found diversion in the fellowship of the happy creatures of the woods.

He now began to ask himself what he should do. The world is wide. One must choose on what part of its broad surface he will dwell. He soon made up his mind to push on to the South, maintaining his disguise. There was some diversion in the thought of tramping, and he determined to ad-

here to that mode of travel for the present. Having settled this point, he struck off at a gait that by the code of trampdom was altogether non-professional.

CHAPTER XVII.

A PEEP AT TRAMPDOM.

The modern tramp is a curious product. The further civilization progresses, the faster his tribe multiplies, and the more distinct his kind becomes. He is a sort of cast-off chip from the great workshop of progress. The higher the civilization, the fiercer the competition, and the more careful the selection. It requires an increasing number of good qualities to meet the demands of modern times, and to maintain a place in its ranks. In a savage state, animal strength wins the crown. Reach of spear and blow of bludgeon make one chief. Later the result hinges on the mind, when keenness of intellect wins over strength of muscle. Then comes the stage where character is dominant, and the noble attributes of the moral nature are the kingly qualities. Then suc-

cess is dependent not alone on what one can do or on what one knows, but also on what he is. This stage, in perfection, is the "Kingdom of Heaven," in which he that is least is greater by the new standard than are they that were greatest by the old. Into it we have not fully entered, but are entering, and the vagrant is here. He is not so much the product as the refuse of this stage. He is the waste timber thrown aside for lack of fitness. He has lost step with the procession, either for lack of will or lack of conscience; maybe, now and then, for lack of pride. He is not so much a criminal as a failure. He is the barbarian of civilized life. He follows the line of least resistance, choosing to drift rather than row.

His existence is not only curious, but pathetic. He lives in a distinct world, the world of trampdom. His way lies apart from the busy, bustling world of thrift and enterprise, in a world without homes, without loves, without marriage, without history, without hope. Without homes, for

the tramp's home is everywhere and nowhere; without laws, for he acknowledges no king, pays no taxes, votes only by fraud, and is patriotic—for bread; it is a world without marriage, for women do not tramp, and the very smile and prattle of childhood would render the life impossible; without history, for it achieves nothing, leaves no monuments along its journey, the only sign of its passing being a track on the highway, some charred fragments in the fence-corners, and now and then a chalk-mark on a wall; without hope, for always to-morrow must be as to-day, only the novelty of change without progress. There are no fortunes to improve, no plans to pursue, no budding purposes to burst into bloom.

The theory of the tramp is that the world owes him a living. It does not enter into his calculations that he owes the world as much as the world owes him; that on his theory, the whole business would go bankrupt for lack of somebody to pay. It is not part of his reckoning that one must

eat bread by the sweat of his own brow, or by the sweat of some other man's brow—by toil or robbery. Was not the quaint old Russian right when he laid it down as Heaven's first law that every man should be a producer? Not necessarily of corn or cabbage or shoes, but of a poem or a hoe-handle, a steam-engine or a cotton-bale, a constitution or a corn-cake. Failing in this, he is cast overboard as a cumbersome weight, eliminated by society. He is incompetent. Whether he wears jeans or broadcloth is all one. Whether voluntarily or involuntarily incompetent is another matter. For the latter, society has her asylums and hospitals; for the former—the highway.

The tramp is something of an artist. It is a marvel of the mind that it will not rest; thought will play about everything it touches. A tramp learns how to ply his calling. These knights of the highway have a standard of artistic excellence among their cult. A tramp has been known to win the admiration of his fellows because he se-

cured a smoking breakfast and a chapter of good advice, where half a dozen others had been compelled to beat an ignominious retreat.

Lawrance had not adopted the tramp life, except for concealment. He would as soon have thought of suicide as of being a vagrant, and his nature was too healthy for either. He had some money. He always paid where it was allowed, and his pride made it hard to refuse his cash. He saw the good and bad side of human character. He met kindness in unexpected quarters, and heartlessness where he expected generosity. Lilies often grow in marshes, ragweeds in flower-gardens.

He soon began to realize how large a part of the beautiful and good in the world strikes its roots in sorrow. He began to see how the plowshare of disappointment turns the noble soil of the human heart and smothers the growth of weeds. He found himself being drawn into fellowship with those who suffer. He began to feel a deepening sense of brotherhood towards all the

unfortunate. He was no longer a being apart whose own sufferings were everything, but he was a fraction of the broad brotherhood "that groaneth and travaileth in pain." This was a sign of a healthy reaction. He began to think, and thinking is a wholesome process. His interest in life began to come back to him. Did his lost faith return? No, he was not conscious of any religious emotion. But who shall say where the germ of faith begins to awake? Who will tell us by what far-off thoughts the Mighty One begins his approach to the heart, and by what circuits he marches his silent cordons? Rather, what is there in thought or feeling that may not be a gateway for the Spirit?

Lawrance began to feel again something of the strange sense of power that dawned on him on that moonlit, love-lit first of May. That sudden birth of his better self was no temporary emotion. There are heights from which we never descend except it be to utter ruin. As the sun's ray paints on the sensitized glass the image that

may be overlaid or remain long undeveloped, so on the sensitive spirit a swift vision smites in some sudden light, and the years may overlay the impress with their rubbish, but it will come forth in its beauty in other days. The dreams of youth may slumber long, and the dead leaves of struggle and disappointment may hide them from view, but if the soul be true, they will come to life in the years when the will is strong to make them splendidly real. That process of self-revelation, begun in the high light of a sudden joy, was being perfected in the fires of trial. Lawrance had found himself on that fateful night, and while now he lacked the thrill of hope that then gave emphasis to the discovery, he began to realize it was no tantalizing vision, but the discovery of a permanent power.

He was lying by the roadside, listening to the many-voiced psalm of nature. He thought of Dora with pain that knew no abatement; of his own weak and unmanly action with shame and humiliation; of his brief experi-

ence in this new life of a tramp with astonishment at himself and at the life; he thought of his mother, and a long, sweet train of memories rushed upon him, while he wondered what she would say of him now; he thought of his future and began to ask himself what it should be. This was the first time he had thought seriously of the future since the crushing blow fell. Now that fairyland of hope loomed up before him and the strength of his youth began to stir within him. Slowly the man in him arose and climbed the rubbish heap of weakness and disappointment under which it had been buried, caught a glimpse of the sky, breathed the healthful atmosphere, felt once more the touch of an invisible hand, then it was that the potential "*I will*" was uttered, and he faced toward victory.

He sat up, looked about him with a new light in his eye, then, feeling the impulse of movement, rose to his feet and hurried onwards. Had he forgotten, was his heart weaned from Dora? No, no. Dora, the dead joy,

the tragedy of his life, was there buried in his heart, but nature was beginning to heal and hide the scar. Is it nature? Is that the name of that mysterious power that guides our thoughts through the mazes of stumbling indecision till we stand in the highway of purpose? Lawrance put that thought from him. He felt a desire for companionship. This was new to him. Since his exile, he had preferred to be alone; now he felt that he should like to commune with his kind. It was the reviving sense of the kinship that binds the race together. A mile from this point he passed a farm-house. As he passed, a man came out at the gate. A single glance told Lawrance he was a tramp. An hour before he would have shunned him, but now he was glad to see him. He could not share the spirit of comradeship with which the man greeted him, for there was still that barrier that consciously separates the man of purpose and pride from those who have lost both. It

was the true caste sign, the sign of a moral distinction. There can be perfect congeniality between the ignorant and the learned, between the rich and the poor, between the high-born and the low-born, for the lines of separation here are more or less superficial, and altogether artificial, but the distinction that exists in character is real, God-implanted. But there are no barriers that shut out sympathy and helpfulness. Lawrance entered into fellowship with this man on that score, and soon gathered his history as they journeyed together, so like in outward seeming, so different in reality. It interested him. He found more in common between himself and this ruined man than he expected. There were many traces of what might have been a noble nature. Lawrance was as one who walks on the silent streets of an exhumed city. It is ruined, dead, but on every hand the eye sees the remains of what was once human life, with all its fulness and beauty. So in this man, who had surrendered hope,

and allowed his manhood to perish, there were the lingering remains of what might have been noble.

When night came, and hunger and weariness with it, these two pedestrians were fortunate enough to secure a supper, and later a bed in the sweet-smelling clover hay that lay heaped in the open field. Lawrance lay looking at the stars and communing with the vast silence till he almost enjoyed peace once more. Under that peaceful blue, decorated with those lamps of the night, it seemed to him any man ought to be happy. The very cattle lay asleep about him, and the pungent scent of the clover was in his nostrils. Now and then the voice of a night-bird broke the stillness, and the bats with restless wings circled above him. These all seemed to him syllables in a great hymn of praise that even night could not altogether silence. It was as if night, like a giant bird, had spread her wings and shut in her brood of living things and hushed their voices into silence—only one here and there broke away

in very excess of gladness. The stream that a hundred feet away rippled its sheen of silver, and crooned its song between undulant stretches of clover, spoke the message of peace and courage it had once spoken to those who lay in the family graveyard not far away, where the modest, white tombstones spoke truth in the starlight, whatever they might speak in the day, for they were saying, "It must all end here."

At last he slept, and sleep conquered the bitterness of his heart and made him the equal of a prince and his cloyer-rick a couch of down. He woke to the rattle of a bell, a cow-bell, whose wearer had felt the dawn in her blood and had arisen to meet the oncoming hosts of the busy day. The east began to blush, and the bare edge of the sapphire crown of morning showed above the hills.

Lawrance rose, went to the branch and bathed his face and drank of the limpid water. He returned to meet the stern reproof of his fellow traveler, who solemnly declared that a morn-

ing bath brought bad luck all day, and that they might as well prepare to go hungry that day. They began their journey at once, for in this tramp life it is the rolling stone that gathers moss. They must at least find something to eat, and not where they found supper, for a tramp's welcome is easily worn out. It was not long till they spied a farm-house showing white through the trees by which it was surrounded, and wearing, as they neared it, that indescribable air of welcome that is characterized by a smiling exterior, where the spirit of neighborliness has come outdoors and robed itself in a beauty for any eye that is hungry for it. The smoke was curling from the chimney of the kitchen, and the shrill treble of the negro cook drifted out to them:

"I's almos' home,

I's almos' home,

I's almos' home,

Fur ter ring-a dem cha'min' bells."

The sun was already up now and all nature was astir. A gentleman came out on the front piazza as our travelers entered the yard. Lawrance,

being new at the business and, furthermore, desirous of studying the methods of the tribe, waited for his companion to make the advances. This he did in the most approved fashion. They had, he stated, had the misfortune to lose their jobs, had both been sick, and were making their way further South where their people were, and would he be so kind as to give them so much as a crust.

The host surveyed the speaker with more interest than sympathy, and when he had finished speaking, laid a hand on his shoulder, and turned him almost about face, then after a moment's scrutiny, laid the other hand on the other shoulder, and lifting his foot, as he stood above the tramp, sent him sprawling on hands and knees in the grass. This was done a great deal more quickly than it takes to tell it, and almost before Lawrance had time to wonder at it; then as the much-surprised tramp gathered himself up, the irate host exclaimed, "Rube Lacey, take yourself out of my yard, or I will give my bull-dog a taste of your

worthless carcass, and don't you dare show your face here again. Begone!" This was spoken in a tone that clearly meant no trifling. Rube was off without parley, and Lawrance was turning to follow, wondering what it all meant, when the stranger laid a hand on his shoulder with a friendly touch, and in his ear an altered voice said, "Stay a short while and you shall have your breakfast." A man so situated does not need two invitations, nor much time to decide, and Lawrance was soon seated on the piazza and having his curiosity gratified as to the meaning of what he had just witnessed.

"You were surprised at my treatment of that pesky fellow. That argues you do not know him. I do. I commanded a company of Ohio volunteers during the war. That man was in it. He is a vagabond by nature. He is an arrant coward. He could not be induced to fight. The only wound he ever got was in the back of his neck. That was at Chickamauga. My men fought like tigers. Rube was found on the field wounded, but he

was wounded in the back. I will not feed a man who was shot in the back. The brave men of the South who faced us, and helped us put into history a record of courage such as the world never saw, can get a piece of the last crust I possess, but one who wore the blue and dishonored it as that man did may starve, for my part. He did not know me, and is no doubt wondering now why I treated him so roughly. But when I heard his voice, by that strange law of association which is so mysterious a power in our make-up, that whole battle came up before me, and amid the smoke and the roar, the faces of the brave boys who followed me into that fight, but never followed me out, even to the hospital (for I went there desperately wounded), looked out of that terrible past. I could not quite think who he could be, but it dawned on me at length, and when I turned him so I could see his dirty neck, the mark of his infamy told the story. I do not wonder he is a tramp. A man who will shirk duty and earn disgrace

as a soldier will fly in the face of life's difficulties. A man who tramps is a cowardly deserter. He has simply met some difficulty in life and lacked the daring to face it out, and having once begun to run has found himself incapable of rallying. From your manner I judge you have not run very far, and my advice is that you make a stand now."

At this point breakfast was announced, and Lawrance was thoughtful while he ate. When he started on his journey, he did not leave the influence of that chance meeting behind him. Over and over it kept recurring to him that perhaps he was the coward that fled rather than fight or endure. There came back to him those lines of Lord Lytton's that over and over kept time to his tramping and seemed a sort of comment on the remark of the captain, "A man who tramps is a cowardly deserter." He was no tramp but he felt now the shame and infamy of a deserter, and kept repeating:

"Let any man once show the world that he feels
Afraid of its bark, and 'twill fly at his heels;
Let him fearlessly face it, 'twill leave him alone;
But 'twill fawn at his feet if he fling it a bone."

His new resolve now began to take shape, and before the day closed it had become a definite purpose. Next to the confidence and conscience for achievement is the intelligent question, "What?" Lawrance had taken the first step as he lay resting by the roadside; he now took the second, and the light widened before his eyes. He would make a study of life among the vagrant and outcast on its own ground and from the vantage of its own ranks. This came to him like an inspiration. From that moment it became a consuming enthusiasm. He was no longer a defeated, aimless man, but a student, a man with a purpose. From that day, with open eyes, mind alert, and sympathies keenly alive, he moved in the great curious, pathetic underworld, where men struggle without sympathy and sin without light. He became fascinated by the study, and as he drew closer to the heart of hu-

manity, he began to hear more clearly the unsyllabled wail of the disappointed and defeated, and conceived a passionate longing to voice it to the world.

CHAPTER XVIII.

A HOME-THRUST.

Dora had well-nigh become accustomed to surprises, but she had not exhausted the catalogue. A new one came one afternoon, some weeks after she had heard the truth from Chris, in the shape of a note from Roswell Grantley. It read as follows:

"MISS MELTON: If you will allow me to see you this evening, I have something to say that may interest you. Should you grant this favor, you will win my gratitude, and you may have reason to be glad for your own sake. Should you refuse, I fear we shall both regret it.

"With lasting regards,

"ROSSELL GRANTLEY."

It was business-like, she thought, and just his way to make it appear no more important to him than to her. But it must be allowed that it was adroit. Who could guess what he

might have to communicate? Perhaps she might learn something that lay near her heart. Besides this, she would have an opportunity to say some things to him she wanted to say. She choked down the indignation she felt at his effrontery and answered in the affirmative.

Roswell was both patient and persistent. He had bided his time. He had made no approaches since Dora so firmly refused to entertain his suit. Now he hoped his opportunity had come. Her hope of Lawrance Kenyon's return was doubtless feeble, and she must now be thoroughly convinced of his unworthiness.

Melton and Ford had not been able to resume business after the fire. They had done a large credit business. Farmers and planters had to begin under hard conditions after the war. They were without fences, for these had been burned. They were without stock, for these had been carried off by one side or the other. The negroes were free, and with freedom came idleness and vice. Many a sol-

dier donned the gray and went to the front, leaving a farm in a high state of cultivation, and returned to find everything in ashes and his fields overgrown with weeds. These veterans exchanged the soldier's gray for the citizen's homespun, and faced the future with a heavy heart and an empty purse. That battle with unaccustomed poverty required more courage than to face the guns at Bull Run or lead an assault at Fredericksburg. This battle was often to be fought with a broken constitution, an armless sleeve, and taxes instead of a pension. There was not much help, save here and there a faithful servant who had stood by "ole mistiss" through the dark days and kept the wolf at bay while master fought at the front, thus making a record of noble fidelity adequately kept only on high. Yes, there was one other who prayed and waited beneath the shadow of the war-cloud and, when the sun of peace shone again, welcomed the new struggle of toil and self-denial with a courage as dauntless as that exhibited by

the soldiers of either side of the late struggle—the wife and mother of the Confederacy. There was yet another helper—the merchant who lent credit that these men might begin. It was here that Melton and Ford took their places in this fierce conflict with the new conditions and fought with their money and financial skill. Many a hearthstone was lit with cheer, and many a plantation took on life and hope, because they trusted landlord and soil. Their accounts could not be paid the first year, only in part, nor yet the second, and they were now in the third, which bid fair to make things easy, and they were straining their resources to the last degree to carry their customers till crops were made, when the fire came. In order to carry out this purpose and have an opportunity for collecting arrearages, they must reopen their business.

But how? They must borrow. They did business with the Grantley bank. They were bound up with that. It was the only chance. When Roswell was applied to, he coolly shook his

head. The times were too uncertain, the risk was too great. In vain Mr. Melton plead the needs of the planters and the difficulty they would have in making new contracts for supplies. In vain did he offer almost unlimited collateral. All the past friendships and favors counted for nothing. Roswell only remembered his reception when urging his suit for Dora's hand, and now he was avenged for that. He even gave a hint, as delicate as such a hint could be, that if things had gone differently in that affair—and the heart of the righteous old man burned, not more with indignation than with disappointment, that the son of his dead friend could so degrade the name.

Promptly at the appointed time Roswell entered the Melton mansion, ushered in by Aunt Lylie, who made an effort to be civil, but only succeeded in being stiff.

Dora appeared, calm and collected, her eyes rather brighter, as they were certainly larger, than before her sickness. There was a chastened expres-

sion that gave to the formerly bright, girlish face a new dignity. The loss of flesh and color was more than compensated by the new light of womanly grace that shone out, and a beholder might almost imagine that the soul had become impatient of the flesh and had made the veil thin that the inner light might the more easily shine through. Roswell started a little when he saw this new Dora. He was already agitated and a trifle uncertain how to proceed. He had hoped to see in Dora some sign that she was humbled, but the haughty air with which she received him was anything but reassuring. He had come to assume the role of condescension, but instead he found himself looked down upon and a suppliant for the grace of a word from those queenly lips. Her manner piqued him and that was a relief. Even anger is a cure for awkwardness, if it does not go too far. He arose when she entered and would have extended his hand, but she bowed, and said simply, "Pray be seated."

He said after a moment's silence, a very brief moment, but it seemed long because it was awkward:

"I am happy to find you looking so well after your severe illness. I trust you are yourself again."

"I suppose," she said, "I ought to say I am grateful for the interest you take in my welfare."

He saw that conciliation was necessary. The frigidity of her manner chilled him.

"Miss Dora, it was my earnest hope that in this, our first meeting for a long time, and perhaps our last for all time, you would exchange your prejudice against me for a more judicial temper. You will believe me when I say that I did not hope for much, but I foresee that the little I did hope for is to be lost to both of us by the attitude you have assumed."

She replied with calm dignity: "That I have assumed any attitude is pure presumption. As to the permanent and fixed attitude of my mind, I am incapable of laying that aside for

an occasion. I dare not act a part, even for the price of your favor for an hour. I believe that it is not my worst fault that I have failed to learn that art by which one makes protean transformations to suit the fancy of the hour."

"Excuse me if I say I admire your candor more than your sense of justice. Granted you are the judge on the bench, and I the accused at the bar, does it follow that all testimony is to be shut off and sentence pronounced because, forsooth, the judge thinks it likely the prisoner is guilty? What I meant by my remark was simply that by your manner of resentment you would render unprofitable, if not impossible, the communications I came to make."

"Oh," said she, "if it is my manner of which you speak, I own to having given very little attention to that. Nature is always sincere. I am afraid studied manners are often the guise of hypocrisy, and I hate that. As to the legal allusion, I know little of

such things but I can not conceive the propriety of reopening a case at every request of the criminal."

"It grieves me much to find you disposed to trifle. I am not in a mood for such things. I am afraid my visit is to prove in vain."

She replied in a tone firmer than she had yet employed:

"When I permitted you to call, I made up my mind to hear you to the end, and that you asked the privilege was to me proof that you were willing to take the consequences. I do not wish to be harsh, but candor compels me to confess it is impossible for me to meet you on the plane of simple confidence."

After a moment's silence, he said in a subdued voice:

"This is unkind, but perhaps I have deserved it. If I were as guilty as you think me, even the penalty of your scorn would be too slight. If to be self-deceived be an unpardonable crime, then I have no pleas to offer. And what is past pardon is also past remedy."

"The remedy is easy—marry the woman you have so wronged," said Dora; then after a pause, and in a changed tone, "But you are right, it is past remedy—for you both."

"To marry where the heart does not consent is a blunder still more fatal and equally beyond remedy. And if we discovered our mistake before it was too late and agreed to drop the affair, was not that the wiser course?"

"To be sure, you dropped the heart of which you had made a toy while it pleased you, and she accepted the situation, as any self-respecting woman would have done. She has not sued for breach of promise, nor published her grief from the housetop, and so you think people ought to be satisfied. You have doubtless heard of the quarrel between the wolf and the lamb. It was mostly on one side, but nevertheless the unoffending lamb was eaten, and I have never heard that it gained much sympathy by complaining, or that the wolf died of a broken heart."

"I see," he replied, "that I must leave to time and soberer judgment the righting of your mind on that score. I trust you will at least credit me when I assure you of my lasting regard for you and of my earnest desire to be a friend to you. If I might claim that, if I could be trusted and thought of as I used to be, it is in my power to render a service to you and yours that lies very near to your heart and still nearer to the heart of your father."

Dora was surprised, she was indignant. The effort at self-control made her voice tremble like a cord when it is strained almost to breaking, as she said, "You ought to have learned by this time that my noble father does not stoop to dishonor, and that I will neither barter my love nor my friendship."

"You persist in misinterpreting my words," he said, hastily. "I only meant to say if things had been as of old it would have been a pleasure to me to——" He could not see his way to go forward; in fact, he felt he had

gone too far already, and heartily wished he could retreat; but alas, while steps may be retraced, words once out are out forever.

"Mr. Grantley," she replied, taking advantage of his pause, "I must inform you once for all that such hints are for the market-place, and not for the more sacred affairs of life. There are some things my father and I hold dearer than gold."

Cut to the heart, convinced beyond all doubt that further words were useless, and feeling that he would be more comfortable out of this situation, he said with an air of wounded dignity:

"Miss Melton, it is clear we can not understand each other. I regret exceedingly that I have so long diverted your thoughts from the knight-errant whose image you no doubt cherish tenderly in his absence, and who will doubtless return to you at his good pleasure." There was no mistaking the cold irony, the cruel sarcasm, of these last words. Into them he threw all the sardonic bitterness of disap-

pointment, all the accumulated resentment of jealousy and wounded pride, that were rankling in his heart. There was no need any longer for seeming, no hope in diplomacy. He arose to retire.

With a quiet, but commanding voice, Dora said, "Do not be in a hurry to be gone. That my company is not the most agreeable to you, I can easily imagine, but before you go, allow me to direct the conversation for a few minutes." He settled himself to listen, saying simply, "As you will."

"I wish to tell you of a very charming story I have been reading," she proceeded. "There are two suitors, or one lover and a suitor. The lover is true, generous, and passionate in nature. The suitor is a man with more shrewdness than conscience, selfish and heartless. The lover is poor and humble, the suitor proud and rich. The suitor is refused. Then, in order to baffle his rival, he perpetrates an infamous fraud and contrives to send the disappointed lover an exile

into the world, and leaves a blighted life behind him. Then the deceiver busies himself to blight the good name and even destroy the liberty of the absent lover, and dares to seek the confidence of the woman's heart that he has crushed by his perfidy."

Her voice grew in force and fulness as she proceeded, and when she closed it was with a passionate climax through which the tragedy of her heart poured its agony. She was gazing straight at Roswell with a look that not only saw but burnt. There are times when the eye is a lash of scorpions. Dora's eyes not only accused, they pleaded, they questioned, they probed the conscience. She had spoken more than she knew, but less than the whole truth. He dared not deny.

Roswell could not conceal his discomfiture. He sat as one spellbound. The color faded from cheek and lip. He clutched his hands till his nails pierced the palms. He would gladly have hid his eyes and stopped his ears, but instead he gazed straight at

Dora and listened to every syllable. When she ceased speaking, his breathing could be heard. He sat in her presence as a felon sits in the presence of the judge who condemns him. In husky, hesitating tones he at last spoke:

"Pardon me—if I can not comprehend—your meaning."

"Pardon me," said she, "if I still believe you can not fail to comprehend; guilt is not so forgetful."

"My God, Dora, spare me! Who told you?—or, rather, what—but, you know, then?" He had risen as if to flee, but dropped heavily into his seat.

"Mr. Grantley, you have tried to think me hard and unreasonable, even wanting in courtesy to a visitor. Now you understand. When I saw before me the man who had destroyed my own happiness and filled the life of one of God's noblemen with bitterness, do you wonder that my heart did not warm to him and that I could not exchange with him pleasant speeches and accept smilingly his gracious advances? Listen to me,

Roswell Grantley," and her voice grew tender and lost all trace of harshness, "we have both suffered, or, at least, I have, and you will, for 'the way of the transgressor is hard.' To add to your suffering would in no sense assuage mine. I have no desire for revenge. I have learned a better way. I shall not reveal this except for the protection of those I love. There was one who said, 'Do good to them that despitefully use you.' He is my judge that from my heart I pity you, for the sufferings of your victims are not to be compared to the agony of a guilty conscience and the curse of God. These are your heritage. If I have given you pain, it was intended to bring you to see your guilt, the depth of which I did not believe you realized. And now that we understand each other, adieu. No; do not ask my pardon—you are forgiven—only ask pardon at the Cross." These words, spoken in a low, tender, solemn voice, full of pity and pleading, were to Roswell like the voice of the Eternal, and he was awed into silence. Dora turned

from him, and as she turned he caught sight of a tear on her cheek. He went out with a new feeling in his heart. There are influences that reveal us to ourselves as by a flash of that "light that never was on sea or land," and we are nevermore the same as we were.

CHAPTER XIX.

AS REVEALED BY TYPE AND TONGUE.

A group of men are gathered around a slight blaze under the bank of the "Father of Waters." Above them is a starlit sky. The subdued murmur of the great river bears accompaniment to their speech and laughter. At their backs is the hum and bustle of the city of New Orleans, not yet asleep. Reflected in the dancing waters are the lights from boats along the shore. These men are seated on chunks of driftwood, broken casks picked up on the wharf and greasy packs they have been carrying. Two or three lie prone upon the ground, as if tired from their day's travel, for these men do not work, they only tramp. One sits a little apart, gazing out across the river with a thoughtful, preoccupied expression. He does not seem to hear what is going on, but a

more careful observation shows us he is giving the closest attention. As he sits there in the starlight, clad as the rest, and with that weary look on his face like the rest, a casual observer would see no difference, but there is something about this man's face, something in that meditative air, that seems to betray a mind divided between the thoughts of the present and the memories of the past. He holds in his hand a notebook, in which now and then he furtively makes an entry. Not so furtively, however, but that he is observed by the keen eyes of one of his companions, who breaks in on the hilarities with:

"Hello, pards, what sort of a rooster is this? Is he a spy on the hunt for game, or a star-gazer, or a poet writin' sonnets to his Mary Ann?"

"Say, my honey," said another, speaking to Lawrance (for it was none other), "we don't 'low no books nor none o' that sort o' truck in this 'ere club-room. It's ag'in the regerlations." There was much more of similar sort, in which the terms "tender-

foot," "infant," "mamma's darling," "greeny," and the like, were used as a tribute to the bookish man. A rather pale, spare young man, who sometimes coughed, said something in a low tone, which Lawrance did not hear, and the raillery ceased.

Let any half dozen men come together for only a few hours, and one of them will develop into a leader whose leadership will soon come to be acknowledged. What is that strange something in one man which others respect and follow? A mob will find its head, even as a republic selects its leader. This feeble young man, who rarely spoke, evidently enjoyed the distinction of leadership in this strange group. His word was law. Did they quarrel, he pacified them. Were they boisterous, he quelled them. There is that in some personalities, which, whether they will or not, commands men.

To detail the conversation of that eventful evening would be to start some of the most profound questions to which men have ever addressed

themselves. It would introduce us to social questions from an entirely new standpoint, and, it may be, a wiser one, for we devote our time too much to considering what ought to be and not enough to considering what is.

The first entry in Lawrance's notebook was, "These are men." Surely a fine starting-point and, shall we not say, a rather novel one. They are viewed habitually as tramps, "the unemployed," "the submerged tenth," or the "criminal class"—not as men, the only true starting-point. Sitting there with the fitful firelight on their grim, forbidding faces, smoking, swearing, jesting coarsely at most sacred things, in seeming league with darkness and chaos, one is tempted to think of these men as belonging to a race by themselves. Yet they had mothers and a home, or what was called one; they cherished the dreams of childhood; they have had their loves and their hatreds; their joys, mostly behind them, and their sorrows, which they wear easily. There are sentences on which their voices falter with pathos

and thoughts that make their speech quiver with indignation. All is not dead in them; they are men.

At length, a broad-shouldered man of forbidding face, who called himself "Shocky," a name evidently suggested by the abundance of grizzly, reddish hair that hung or rather spread out around his shoulders, took from his pocket a worn newspaper and began to unfold it carefully. This drew attention his way. He said, referring to the book episode:

"Ef you don't want any books around, maybe you fellers could stomach a hair-liftin' story from raal life. You've been a spoutin' yer yarns here, and I made up my mind yer in yer A B C's in the business. You've been in some tight places, but not a blamed galoot among you ever got cremated and then read yer own 'bituary in the papers. But here's one what has;" and he handed the paper to the slim young man, saying, "Jist you read that, pard." The young man took the paper and read aloud an ac-

count of the fire that destroyed Melton and Ford's store, and of the man supposed to have been burned. When he read the name of the paper, *The Vandalia Herald*, May 3, 1868, Lawrance visibly started, and as the reading proceeded, his face was pitiful to behold. He struggled to appear indifferent, but how could he? It was the first time he had heard of the fire. He had avoided newspapers, and so knew nothing till now. And it had occurred on the very night he left Vandalia! A fearful dread began to settle upon him. His agitation escaped the notice of all save one, and that was the reader.

At the conclusion of the reading, Shocky exclaimed, "Pardners of misery, I'm the chap that stole that ride on 'Lija's chariot. I'm the poor unfortunate that got cremated an' no funeral charges. Can you beat that?" This remark was greeted with various and sundry ejaculations, untranslatable into plain English, supposed to contain wit entirely adequate to the

situation, and adapted to the case of a man who, so to speak, attended his own funeral.

Then drawing another paper from his pocket, he handed that with an air of triumph to the same one. It was dated May 4th, and contained the following:

“MORE ABOUT THE FIRE.

“The burning of Melton and Ford’s store on the night of the second has been the subject of much comment. This comment has been spiced with speculation, both as to how the fire occurred and the identity of the man who lost his life in the flames. It is believed by many that the building was set on fire. There had been no fire about the building during the day or night, nor in any place near the building. It must have been the work of an incendiary, and suspicion points to an employee, who has never before been suspected of any wrong. Rumor has it that an affair of the heart, which for the sake of all concerned we will not mention in detail, incited him to

the deed, and that it was done purely for revenge. There were no indications of burglary, or other assignable reason than the one hinted at above why he should have committed the deed. Weight is given to this theory by the fact that this young man disappeared the night of the fire and has not been heard of since, and no one knows anything whatever of his whereabouts.

"No clue has yet been found as to who the man was who perished in the flames. No one has been missed but the young man above mentioned, and there are many who believe he was the unfortunate one. Yet the most diligent search has revealed no sign of his identity among the ashes, in the way of watch, keys, jewelry, or anything of the sort. There are many questions that arise. Did he in a fit of despondency or insanity fire the building with the intention of making it his funeral pile, then aroused at last make a frantic but futile effort to escape the doom he had planned?

"Many who plainly saw the man at the window of the burning building declare that he bore no sort of resemblance to the young man in question. That being the case, it was perhaps some man who rushed in to assist in saving the store, and retreat was cut off by the flames. It must be admitted that Vandalia has a mystery that is likely to remain one for some time to come."

Lawrance was struck dumb by this revelation. If the first account had startled him, the second, in which he saw himself held up as maniac or criminal, overwhelmed him. But this was not the end. The hero of this little drama answered the chorus of exclamations and questions with:

"Ef you confounded curmudgeons 'll hold yer infernal clappers, I'll tell you a dandy that'll make that myst'ry as cler as the bead on a glass o' ole' rye. You see, I was comin' that er way, ez any hones' knight o' the ties mout er bin. After I'd got my supper at a pious ole whipper-snapper's that giv' me cold chuck, and sassed it with

warnin's from the good book, I wuz comin' th'oo the town, an' I met a measly-lookin chap wearin' the rig uv the fraternity. I says to him, 'Hello, pard, what hotel you stoppin' at?' He said ther wa'n't none in that measly town tony 'nough fer his sort, an' he'd made up his mind ter cut ther whole caboodle. 'Come with me,' says I, 'to the only fust-class outfit in the town.' 'Fore dark I had seed some straw an' boxes at the hin' eend uv a big store. So we slipped in there an' laid down. The other chap quiled up like a tired dog on the straw, an' soon he wuz snorin' like a sawmill. I lit my pipe an' had giv' it a few pulls, when my peepers fell onto a door in a sort er shed-room at the eend o' the big store. Yer see, I'm none er yer one-hoss sideshows, but er reg'lar combination outfit. I know ther ropes er the trade, an' can change climate fast 'nough ter keep cumf'table, an' then I can merniperlate the tools jes' fur pastime. It puts pepper in the soup an' makes life interestin'. Some things is ter be had fur ther askin', an'

some is ter be had fur the takin', an' one's ez cheap as t'other. A door's a temptation, I argy, that oughtn't ter be set before the virtuous youth uv the land. It's more then the weakness uv the flesh kin stand. I went across ter this door, an' tried her with my pets thet I allus' carry, an' it opened like er charm. When I got inside, I struck a match, an' it wuz full er barrels an' cans an' things. The sight uv er barrel teches my nerves same ez the sight uv the mother's breast does a baby, so I went up ter one by the light uv my match, an' the smell uv it showed it wan't nuthin' but this 'ere kerryseen. But I seed a kag in the corner that had er devil uv er suspicious look. I went over ter that, an' the smell uv it carried me back twenty year. I felt my mouth waterin' like er wet-weather spring. Ther wuz er quart-cup er settin' on top uv it, an' I snatched it up an' turned the fawcet into it. I could hear it laugh an' sing ez it run, an' the very soun' seemed to make me furgit my troubles. Talk 'bout yer music an' yer sweet soun's,

but erbout the sweetes' soun' these ears of mine have ever hearn, sence my mammie sung me ter sleep, wuz the guggle uv that lickin' in that quart-cup. When I couldn't stand to hear it no longer fur the cravin' fur er taste, I tuk a big gulp uv it. Gee-whilikins! Thunder an' blazes! It wuz strong ez aky-fortis, an' hot ez liquid perdicion. It 'peared ter cook the hide clean down ter my heels. Fur er minnit, I wuz ez blind ez er bat, an' couldn't git er breath. I tried ter holler fur help, but yer cain't holler 'thout breath. The tears run down same ez when my daddy used ter thrash me. Thunder and blazes! but I thought I wuz pizenened shore. But 'dreckly, I got my breath back agin, an' begun ter feel easier. Soon ez I could, I struck er match an' saw er paper on the head uv the kag marked, 'Alkerhaul,' an' then I knowed it wan't pizen. Feelin' strong ernough ter go on with my investergations, I went up er pair er stairs side er the brick. There wuz another door at the head uv the stairs. It wuz unlocked, so I invited myself

in. I hadn't much more'n got inside, when my head begin ter whirl like windin'-blades; I begin ter feel ez heavy ez ef I weighed er ton; my knees begin ter trimble, an' I couldn't move er peg. That all-fired stuff had flew ter my head, an' I wuz dead drunk. I jes' fell in er heap like er wool sack, an' in er minnit didn't know no more'n er dead man. I don't know how long I laid in that shape, but when I waked up, I thought shore I had gone ter kingdom come. There wuz smoke, smoke, ever'wher', an' the sparks an' cinders wuz fallin' roun' me like rain. I heerd the folks screamin' an' rushin' erbout outside. I jumped up an' turned to'ards the door that I come in at, an', by jucks, the blaze wuz rushin' an' howlin' through it like the devil beatin' tan-bark. In er minnit I wuz ez sober ez er judge. I felt my way the best I could ter the side winder, an' quick ez lightnin' broke the sash. Then there wuz big bars on the outside like them on er jail. I laid holt an' done my level best ter break 'em, but they

wuz too tough fur me. I could see the faces uv the people as they looked up at me. Then I felt the floor give 'way, an' I went down with er crash. I give it up, I thought I wuz er gone fawn-skin an' no mistake. All at onct I felt er mighty jolt an' when I come ter myself, I wuz lyin' in er cool place, erbout ez dark ez Egypt. When I raised up, my head come nearly opposite ter er hole that showed the light on the outside. Reachin' up, I found it wuz er place wher' air comes into er cellar. There wuz bars outside o' this too, an' in huntin' 'round fur somethin' ter break 'em with, my hand fell on er big rope an' then on the edge uv er platform I wuz standin' on, an' lookin' up, I seed er square hole in the upper floor, an' then I knowed 'twuz the elevator. The ropes hed burnt in two, an' I wuz standin' on it when it fell. I got a good grip on one er them bars an' swung myself up. I found they wuz busted loose at one end, so I wrenched 'em off an' crowded out. Then I wuz 'twixt two walls not more'n a yard apart, an' it wuz a reg'-

lar Vissuvius, only the fire wuz comin' down instead er goin' up. I had ter do somethin' mighty quick. I felt 'long the wall er the other house ter a window. This I pried open in a jiffy, an' climbed in, feelin' my way to the rear, fur I didn't want ter go out at the front. I found the door open. Some people wuz there all excited. I grabbed er box an' run right through the crowd, an' nobody noticed me. That wuz what I wanted. I w'an't hankerin' after public rekernition then, fur if they'd er caught me, I'd er thought it hard luck that I'd got out er the fire into the fryin'-pan. When I got out, you'd better bet yer bottom dollar I made tracks. So yer see, ez fur ez that hullabaloo about that man that got roasted's concerned, it's all foam an' no beer, fur he's here soun' an' out er jail an' able ter eat his 'lowance. But, pards, what I allus wanted ter know wuz whut become uv that spider-legged paddy I left sleepin' in the straw."

This recital was received with much enthusiasm and applauded as "the

best thing in the show." Exciting as it was, Lawrance was unable to follow it. The thoughts that filled his own mind were more exciting still. Dora—what did she think of him now? Did she believe him capable of such a crime? Perhaps now he was to her but a criminal, who was willing to stoop to injure her and her father because she had refused him. His heart was still sore. He felt that she had not been even kind in her refusal, but still he could not bear to be held a criminal in her eyes. Did he know she believed him dead, he would not care, he would even rejoice, but as he thought of her mind being poisoned with a vile suspicion, an indescribable pang shot through his heart. He would cross oceans and continents, he would even die, to remove that suspicion. What others might think he did not care, but she must know that his honor was unstained. She might not care for him, she evidently did not, but she should not despise him as a base criminal. If she could only know this man's

story. If he could in some way secure the proof of what he had just heard. This would be his only opportunity. To-morrow these men would be up and away, he knew not where, and the lips of the only man who knew the most important secret on earth to him would be closed to the utterance that might save his name in the eyes of the only one for whose good opinion he cared. He did not sleep, but lay on the bare earth, gazing at the distant stars and thinking of these things the remainder of the night.

When the first faint streaks of gray began to adorn the east, he arose and moved cautiously among the prostrate forms locked in the healthful slumber of men tired with travel and breathing the pure oxygen day and night. He was making his way to where the burly "Shocky" lay with a chunk of driftwood under his head, when the young man who had been reader for them rose, and, motioning to Lawrance to follow, stole away to a safe distance. Full of wonder at what it meant, Lawrance followed. When

out of earshot of the others, the young man turned and said:

"I think I understand you. You are not one of that sort. Neither am I. You do not know me, but I know you. Your name is Kenyon. I knew you the moment I saw you. How? I saw you the afternoon before the store in which you were bookkeeper was burned. Look at that by the light of this match," and he handed Lawrance a photograph. What was his astonishment to look on a picture of himself. For the moment he could utter no word which was fitting, and the young man made a gesture for silence and proceeded:

"Do you wonder that I knew you? Listen. I am a detective, not by profession—for I am a lawyer—but because it interests me and because I hope to build up my health in this way. And you are here because—well, that does not matter now. You want the proof of what you heard from Shocky last night. You were about to do a very foolish thing. That man is desperate, dangerous. You have money.

Had you told him so, he would not have hesitated to feed your body to the fish, if he got a chance. There is not another man there who would harm a hair of your head, or take your purse if you left it lying in sight. But Shocky, I saw him watching you. He is suspicious. Had you offered to bribe him, it would have been not only useless but dangerous. I was with him the night of the fire. I was not asleep when he entered the door. Men are not always asleep when they snore. But being weary, I fell asleep, and was wakened by the fire-bells just in time to escape. I was on his track, and that was the first time I had met him. I have seen him several times since, but he has not recognized me. He is one of three men who robbed a train of the ——— railroad last winter. The others are about San Antonio, Texas, where he is going to meet them. I shall keep track of him until I can seize all three.

"How did I come by your picture? It was sent to me here. It appears

that the insurance companies are on your track. They have somehow been led to believe you burnt the store. They have somehow discovered or guessed that you are wandering in this guise, and have set me on the trail. You may keep the picture. I am at your service."

Here he extended his hand, which Lawrance grasped, while his eyes swam in tears. He had listened to this man's rapid tale with deepening wonder and in rapt silence. He felt a swelling of unutterable gratitude to this man who assumed to his mind the mission of a benefactor to him in his extremity, but instead of uttering his thanks, or expressing his surprise, he returned to the one thing that concerned him most.

"The proof, can I get that?" he asked.

"Yes, I can do so, if you will trust me."

"Trust you? Nothing is easier."

"Then leave it to me; and now we must part, for they are stirring already."

A few more hurried words, and these two understood each other. Henceforth they were friends, and Lawrance felt he could rest his interests in such hands without hesitation. Thus they parted and went their ways.

CHAPTER XX.

WESTWARD AND WORKWARD.

We parted with Lawrance in New Orleans. When he bade farewell to the tramp detective, he turned his face towards Texas. It was growing hot, and counting cross-ties is not a choice pastime under a Southern sky in June. Consequently, Lawrance preferred to travel on the trains, only acting in his character as tramp when it was possible to study that interesting species. A few days later found him in San Antonio, whither he had bent his steps from New Orleans.

He felt the throb of a restless energy. He was anxious to work. He meant to write a book on "tramp life." For this he had been accumulating materials. It was to be fiction founded on the facts he had gathered and was gathering. He felt that sense of power to do, that burning eagerness

to begin, and saw the outline grow into shape before his mind with that delicious vividness, which together constitute the signs of a vocation. He was moved by no mercenary motive, nor by mere ambition, but by an almost overmastering desire to express what was seething in his mind. He was in that mood out of which all great achievements are born. No man says his best word till he speaks as a prophet on whom the breath of the unseen has fallen, and through whom a strange new voice, before unheard, is struggling for expression.

To secure a room, to clothe himself decently, to procure materials, and to begin, required a very brief time. It was amazing to him how thoughts crowded upon him. He had never before found such pleasure in work. Reading over late at night the pages he had written during the day was more intensely interesting than that of any romance he had ever read. These pages were a surprise to him. He had never dreamed of being capable of such work—but once.

He was making great headway in his work, when he suddenly remembered more than three months had passed and he had not yet seen nor heard from the detective. He had the pledge of this man that the coveted confession of Shocky should be put in his hands, either by mail or in person, at the earliest possible moment. His impatience had been allayed by the interest in his work, and if it had not, what could he have done? He could not guess where his detective was wandering, yet he had unbounded confidence in his integrity and also in his capacity to do what he had promised. Still, as the days wore on, he became more restless and waiting became harder. This day the burden became too great for work, and he pushed his papers aside and went out for a walk.

He soon found himself in the Alamo, for his room was not far from this shrine of liberty. He walked back and forth in the old building with its dirt floor, the same floor once dyed with patriot blood; gazed upon the walls, the same

walls once stormed by shot and shell, and felt the thrill of the memories which that handful of men on that fatal day had bequeathed to these dead rocks, and listened to the trumpet-tongued voice of freedom, with which they had animated this historic pile. He thought how much nobler was man than all his works, how he can give to dull matter a value and a meaning that shall thrill generations yet to be. There is no beauty of form, nor grandeur of proportion, nor charm of color that can match the magnificence of noble deeds. The Pass of Thermopylæ needs no chisel or brush or architect. It has been made forever sacred ground, set apart from all other spots, by the chrism of heroic blood. The Alamo, although a humble building, has been lifted infinitely above the architectural splendors of the world's great buildings. It was lit with a glory no painter's brush could furnish, a glory that still dazzles the tear-dimmed eyes of all patriot pilgrims from the ends of the earth, by the cruel offering there made on the

altar of freedom. It is not always what men accomplish, but sometimes what they dare attempt, that is great; and apparent failure is sometimes real success. The men who died at the Alamo lived multiplied a hundred times at San Jacinto. The hands that let fall the broken swords in death, but not defeat, rocked the cradle in which the giant Liberty was nurtured.

Such thoughts filled the mind of Lawrance, and made him for a time oblivious to all else. At last when he shook off the spell and turned his thoughts to the present and his eyes to the door, he saw a man gazing at him in a fashion and with an eye he did not fancy, and they belonged to an altogether unprepossessing personality. Somehow he felt a little squeamish, but he put the incident from his mind and returned to his room and to his work, and, as he thought of the detective's delay, consoled himself with the thought that there were many interruptions likely to occur in the travel of one pursuing a tramp. The de-

tective had probably been led far out of the way and would require time. He trusted implicitly in the faith of this new friend, so strangely discovered.

It was his habit now and then to don his tramp outfit and go out and make a detour of the city and suburbs, always keeping his note-book handy, and keeping his eyes open for "Shocky," or any familiar face. He thus found opportunities for his peculiar study, and at the same time refreshed his mind and body with change, and returned to his task reinvigorated. All he had to do was to clothe himself properly, walk out, lock his door, turn round to the right, pass through a hedge of fig-trees, clamber down the river-bank at the rear of the house, come out at whatever street suited his fancy, either above or below, then go on his way. When ready to return, he simply retraced his steps, and no one was the wiser. The despised tramp of yesterday was the polite, attractive gentleman of the breakfast-table. No one knew who or what he

was. He was the masked boarder, the subject of much gossip in guesses. We could enliven these pages with the grotesque suspicions and wild surmises exchanged by his fellow boarders, all of which anyone could safely vouch for who is familiar with human nature of the boarding-house variety. We must, however, leave something to the imagination of the reader or to his experience. The imagination of Lawrance was much aided by certain mysterious glances exchanged at the table, certain questions asked with a poorly feigned indifference. He was not a little amused at the curiosity of two single ladies of uncertain age, which was obtrusive enough to have been exasperating if it had not been so amusing. By purest chance he learned that he was reputed to have five living wives, when the poor fellow could not get himself one; that he was engaged in vast mining speculations in Mexico and was worth millions, when if "Tramp Life" failed to prove a remunerative venture, he should soon be in a position to try

that life in earnest; that he was a detective, and was liable any day to create a sensation by seizing some noted criminal, when he was far more likely to be seized himself. From this he could guess at the unsettled state of the boarding-house mind in regard to its mysterious boarder. Had he forgotten Dora? Rather, let us ask, was she ever absent from his mind? Did the pain of her loss ever leave him? Fight as he would against it, the sense of his utter loneliness and desolateness would come over him again and again, like a huge wave, and Dora's image would steal in between his eye and the blank page and he would drop his pen and think, and think always of the night under the beech and the few hours of delirious joy he had known. When he wrote a page that was particularly pleasing to him, he found himself wondering if it would ever fall under Dora's eye, and if she would praise it; and then he bent to his work with a new zest. More than he knew, though in sorrow and bitterness of heart, he was

still working under the inspiration of his pure first love. Love for Dora had discovered to him his power, and the thought of her held that power to its task. There was slight hope that what he did would be rewarded by her smile, but, nevertheless, back through the weary, checkered months ran the unbroken thread of his sweetest memory to the scene under the beech, and along with it, as an electric current, thrilled an undying inspiration. Why, he could not tell. The best and most beautiful things in human experience defy analysis.

CHAPTER XXI.

TRAIL AND COUNTER-TRAIL.

Lawrance was returning to his lodgings late one night in his customary disguise. He had just crossed a foot-bridge and was making his way across a lonely bit of common, the very appearance of which was suggestive of ugly deeds. It was dark with overhanging boughs, and the foot-path was lined with rank weeds and bushes. Suddenly, in the darkness he heard footsteps coming on in an opposite direction, a sudden blaze of light fell full upon him, and lingered for a moment, then it was dark again. It was not an experience one would court for the pleasure of it. In a moment, before he had time to think twice, he heard the steps move aside in the gloom, as if inviting him to pass. This invitation he was not slow to accept. The light, he felt sure, came

from a dark-lantern in the hands of some man who had studied him for a moment by its light and, probably judging from his garb that he was not a tempting prize for robbery, had let him pass.

He congratulated himself that he was well out of it when he had entered the open street, a hundred yards away. He was breathing freely and walking with quick steps towards his room, when there came over him that strange impression of being followed which without any testimony of the senses sometimes steals upon one, something like the impression made upon the nerves by the air of a damp, cold cellar. Looking back, he saw a man slouching in the shadows on the opposite side of the street. A little observation proved that this man was keeping even pace with him. When he turned the corner and passed on a few paces, he looked again and the pursuer was still on his trail. He naturally connected this man with the encounter in the common, and could but wonder why he should follow him,

seeing there was no effort made to overtake him. There is a natural disposition to elude one who pursues you, a desire to escape prying eyes. Lawrance began an effort to elude this man. He did not go direct to his room, but by a circuitous route reached the river a block below, and managed to throw himself over the railing of the bridge that spans the river there and clamber down the bank into the shadow before his pursuer came in sight. He heard footsteps cross the bridge and felt that he had thrown his man off the trail. Lawrance came out from his hiding-place, made his way along the margin of the river, climbed the bank and was soon in his room, where he thought much over the strange incident. Perhaps he would have thought more had he seen the man who watched him by the feeble street-lamp from behind a pillar of the bridge until he passed behind the fig-trees in the yard.

There was a stranger at the breakfast-table next morning. He wore a face that made you ask questions, a

face that seemed to have something behind it that its owner would not care to tell. Lawrance was not favorably impressed by him. He was sensible of an uncomfortable feeling in this stranger's presence. Who has not felt so?

Lawrance saw him no more till supper. After supper, it was not a mere accident that led Lawrance to follow the stranger as he went out. He could not say just why he took the same street and, keeping well in the shadows and at an unsuspicious distance, watched this man who had somehow interested him. A few blocks away there was a broken fragment of wall that once enclosed a part of the court of the Alamo. Near this two men emerged from the shadows and joined the other. Together they stole into the cover of this wall and sat down. By a slight circuit Lawrance could come up on the opposite side and easily hear their conversation. It was an astonishing conversation to him.

"We must make sure of our man," and Lawrance recognized the voice of the new boarder. "A mistake would make mischief. Nobody seems to know anything of him at the boarding-house. The time he has been there is all right, but we must be sure."

"Sure! Don't I know that curmudgeon? Didn't I see him las' night in the same gyarb he wore at New Orleans? Didn't I see 'im go up the bank like er beaver goin' to his hole, an' ain't that the only boardin'-house on that street? Didn't I see him this mornin' in his other rig, an' I tuck 'im in at a glance? Pard, it's the same galoot. Changin' cloze don't change the man. The game's treed shore, or my name ain't Shocky. He's waitin' here fur them papers that sickly chap got fixed up fur 'im. I'm a-thinkin' it's likely that hobo's passed in 'is chips, and them papers went up the spout with him. He promised me er slice er the puddin' he wuz bakin', but it's no use waitin' fur that. If we kin git our clinchers on this rooster, we'll pull a pile er feathers out er him, or

else git the reward thet's offered fur 'im."

Lawrance listened to their plot to seize him and secure a handsome sum either as reward or, preferably, force him to pay them a round price for liberty. His blood leaped as he listened. He saw all too clearly the peril to which he was exposed. He knew something of the infamy and cruelty of these men. He had tried to realize a sort of kinship between himself and all the world's wanderers, and had schooled himself to look with a degree of allowance on that in the lives of such men which was intolerable in other men. He now saw a gulf yawn between him and these men as wide as eternity. His sense of brotherhood received a great strain. He saw his own case was desperate indeed. Brutal and criminal as these men were, their standing was equal to his, and might be a vast deal better if they were not mistaken in their supposition concerning his present position before the law.

He gave way to a momentary feeling of dread. Then came a swift reac-

tion. The fear which he had at first felt of these men gave way at once to a sense of power and security. Before he had taken time for thought, he had leaped over the wall and stood before the wretches, his form straightened to its full height, his arms crossed on his breast, and his eyes fixed fiercely on them. They were taken completely by surprise. They rose to their feet and stood as if uncertain what to do. Each right hand sought instinctively the deadly revolver, the inseparable accompaniment of a criminal life. Here they paused as if some strange power held them in its grasp. Standing thus in the half-light, they formed an interesting group. Lawrance broke the silence. He spoke slowly and in a low tone, but his words vibrated and throbbed with passion:

"Villains, here is your victim," he said. "He is only one, you are three. He is unarmed. You are armed for deeds of death. But I defy you. I am in your power, but you will not dare to do me harm; not because you do not desire it, but because you

are weak and cowardly. You are wanting in that which alone makes men strong and brave; with that I am armed, and it is an armor that hate can not penetrate nor brute violence overcome. The innocent are always master of the guilty. You meet in the darkness to plot against a fellow-man who never did you or any man harm. You would destroy him as coolly as you would set your foot on a worm in your path. Not content with murder and pillage, you would traffic in weakness and misfortune, and see the innocent wear the infamy of your guilt. Beware! Your time is short. If you would lengthen the chapter of your guilty deeds, make haste. Would you add one more crime to the crimson list, now is your opportunity."

Here he drew a step closer, and his tones softened, "Do I hate you? Why should I? I pity you. The same God made you and me. His stars shine alike up there for you and for me, but your deeds dim their light. You were once little chil-

dren, clinging to the breasts of fond mothers. What would it not be worth to you to-night to live for one brief moment amid the experiences that your innocent childhood filled with happy dreams. I have read the fiery syllables in which the tragedy of lives like yours is written. I have listened to the lengthened cry of anguish that the guilty smother behind a criminal exterior. I have seen the feeble but passionate movement of the poor broken wings of a mangled manhood. I would not punish you if I could. I would not exchange places with you for the world. I am unfortunate, you are criminal. There is no misfortune that a true life may not illumine, there is no fortune that guilt will not turn into a hell. O brothers, brothers—but what am I that I should so speak?” So saying, he turned abruptly to walk away, not a hand or a voice forbidding. Some influence seemed to restrain them.

But the restraint was only momentary. He had only taken a step when a blow on the head felled him

to the earth and left him only half conscious of what was going on. In less time than is consumed in the telling, he was bound, gagged, and being dragged along by these desperadoes he knew not where. They had taken the precaution to blindfold as well as to gag him. They stopped at length, and he heard a grating sound, as of the opening of a heavy door or the removal of some obstruction. Then he was carried through a narrow opening and down a short flight of steps into what he took to be a cellar. He heard the door or grating close after them. Then they made their way along what seemed a narrow passage for quite a distance, and Lawrance was laid on a damp stone floor. In a few minutes the bandage was removed from his eyes, and he saw a rather forbidding situation. By the dim light of a rude lamp that hung from a wall of masonry, he saw they were in a sort of tunnel, with some rude stools, stuff for pallets, and other primitive articles, indicating that this was a hiding-place to which these

men were accustomed. They withdrew to a short distance and consulted together a few minutes, and when they returned, the spokesman of the three began:

"Seeing you are to share our hospitality for a time, Mr. Kenyon, we extend a welcome, and offer you the best we have. We hope you will make yourself comfortable during your stay. Roarer, bring that bottle from the sideboard and we will drink to the health of our guest."

The sideboard was a greasy box, used evidently as cupboard, table, chair, as the occasion might demand.

"Here's to you, and to prove it isn't poison," and the spokesman drank deeply, then handed to Lawrance, who refused it, and to the others, who drank freely.

"We have been looking for you for some time," the spokesman resumed. "A mutual friend got us interested in you before we came to the city this time. We are sorry to have overlooked you so long. We meant no disrespect; it was unavoidable. Just

as we were planning to go to you, by a stroke of good fortune you came to us. We were too polite to interrupt you in the fine things you were saying, and besides, the street is not a suitable place to conduct a serious discussion. So when you concluded, we decided to return to our private chamber and bring you with us.

"What you were saying to us, Mr. Kenyon, would doubtless be applicable, if there were any truth in the adage, 'There is honor among thieves;' but that is one of those convenient falsehoods invented by the crafty and reiterated by the ignorant. There is the same honor among thieves as among other people; that is, none at all. For instance, here are three of us; I do not trust these, they do not trust me. When it is to their interest to betray me, they will do so. They know I hold them as dear as their service to me can make them. When their hanging shall pay me better than their living, I hang them, and, as the teachers say, vice versa. To this hour, we hang together, that we may not

hang separately. That remark is historic, and history is repeating itself. We three are engaged in a revolution. We want to get the bottom rail on top. That is to say, we are normal human beings, with the luck a little against us at present.

"Men live together in society as we live here. They watch each other, use each other, and, as opportunity offers, devour each other. I was devoured several times myself while clinging to that stale lie that honest men outnumber rogues. Why do men obey laws? Because they think it best for themselves. We think it to our interest to violate law. Where's the difference? Sleek and proper gentlemen pose as patterns of righteousness and grow rich off the gullibility of the public. Their manners are the smooth key with which they unlock the safety-vaults of success. We choose to use a different kind of key. They are called gentlemen and we are called rogues. Well, there is nothing in a name, and it's all one to me which one I am called by. It comes to the same

in the end. I have my little day, and then—well it is interesting. One can't have his way all the time, and the only wisdom in this world is to make the most of it while you can. I used to be what the world calls a gentleman, but— (here there was a pause, and a brief shadow crossed the careless face)—let that pass. It is out of its dramatic relations in this chapter.

"To come to the point: you are a gentleman among thieves. As the thieves are in the majority, and thieves and gentlemen can not agree, I suppose it is clear to you that the gentleman must lose the contest. In other words, you are in our power. The law wants you. The law has offered to pay a thousand dollars for you. We are opposed to the law, but we want the money. You pay us the money, and you go free. If you don't, then we turn you over to the law. We shall regret to do the law a favor, but it is in exchange for a favor. We prefer to give you your freedom for the same amount. It is purely a matter of business with us, and the profits

of business are simply a question of power.

"To illustrate: You are in debt. You go to your sleek shylock, and you say, 'Lend me.' He smiles, rubs his hands, and says, 'The risk is great. I must have my twenty per cent.' You cringe, but you pay it. The power is his—of money. Or you are hungry. It is bad to be hungry. You go to the man who sells food. He and others have bought it all up. They have held it, counting on the power of hunger. He says food is up, *up*. But you must pay the price. He has the power on his side. These are our power (patting the butt of his pistol and the ropes on Lawrance's hands and feet). Your liberty is at stake. We demand our little profit. You pay it. We smile, and you go free, and we go on our way.

"You will vote for your shylock and your food-vender for congress as soon as they are rich enough, us you will hang—when you catch us. That is a blunder. It is all a blunder. Had

there been anything else, I should have been living on Fifth avenue, instead of in—well, it don't matter where, only it is not exactly a palace."

Then after a pause, "What have you to say to our proposition?"

The face and manner of this man had been a study during his talk. Lawrance saw before him a sort of combination of the shrewd man of affairs, the blase man of the world, the abandoned criminal, and the embittered misanthrope. It was hard to tell which predominated. His situation was not favorable either to the study of character, to which he had schooled himself, or to the enjoyment of a peculiar type, but he could not help being drawn away from his perils by both influences as he listened and watched by the flare of the lamp that hung by the wall the changes on the face of this strange man. His absorption had kept him from being ready for his part in the curious performance. Indeed, he had hardly been able to realize what it all meant. He was about to speak after a time, but was relieved

from doing so by the spokesman, who began again:

"You do not answer? Perhaps you want a little time to think it over. You have understood me, and know the alternative. You pay us our profit in this little game and go free, or the law pays it and you go to prison. At any rate we are sure of our profit. Do you understand?" Lawrance simply nodded. "Then I give you till morning to decide. Then, if you have a friend, you can write him, or her (and here there was a look that had some meaning Lawrance did not then divine). Here are writing materials. You can write and I will deliver your missive. Now I must leave you, for my business calls me. Make yourself as comfortable as you can, for you may have to enjoy the hospitality of our mansion for some time, till this business is settled. Good-night."

So saying he stole into the darkness. His footfalls could be heard like the tick of a clock, until he passed out into the night. Lawrance now

began to study the situation more closely. By the dim light of the lamp he could see above a few feet an arch of masonry, beneath which one could scarcely walk erect. On either side were walls only a few feet apart. This was all, except two walls of darkness that wavered and crept as the lamp flared and flickered. He made out that he was imprisoned in some sort of walled passage or tunnel. There was clearly no need for guards, and soon the two remaining men went out without even a word, except a whispered consultation together.

Left thus, Lawrance never felt himself so much alone. It was as if all the world was dead and he was in a living grave. He had read of darkness that could be felt, but he had never before thought of a silence that could be felt. The sound of his own breathing startled him and he could hear the beating of his heart. He welcomed the companionship of a spider that crawled out in the light on the wall opposite. It was a comfort to know that one other living thing

tion. It was plainly a desperate one. These men were capable of anything, however mean or cruel. They cared nothing for human life and as little for human rights. He could not pay their price for liberty even if he would, and he would not if he could. He must take his chances in the courts, if he were ever so fortunate as to see the light of day again. Those men led a precarious life. They might be captured or killed in their prowling, and he be left to die unhelped and unpitied in that awful dungeon. These thoughts occupied his mind he knew not how long. It seemed to him an age since he had come there, when—what was that? It surely sounded like a footfall in the silence. It was coming nearer. Was it a footstep or only the beating of his heart? He could not hope for the coming of a friend, but an enemy was preferable to this loneliness and silence. To lie still in such a den, not knowing where you are, with vistas of unexplored darkness, and you know not what else, be-

tween you and light, the sound of dripping water striking on the air in the dead silence—thus to wait for you know not whom or what to creep upon you, and no hand to strike in your defense, and no ear to hear your cry—it must be a hot-blood that would not chill at the experience. The steps came nearer. Lawrance held his breath. Nearer still. Straining his gaze, he saw in the dim light, that had grown dimmer now, a shadow waver on the wall, then the form of a man come in view. Nearer still. In his hand was something that glistened in the light. It was a knife. Nearer—the form bent over his. The empty left hand was laid on his shoulder, a gruff voice said: “Are you awake?”

The eyes alone answered.

“Be easy. Do as I tell you.” And he stooped and cut the ropes from the feet. “Get up—come.” Without another word the man moved in the direction from which he had come, with a very cautious tread, now and then pausing to listen, with finger on his

lip. Lawrance's hands were still bound. Where was he being led? On, on, it seemed to him an interminable distance, in the choking air, the impenetrable darkness, the mouldy smells no sunlight had ever touched with one purifying ray. On, on, in silence, broken only by the ring, ring, of their footsteps, hollow and weird. At last there was something akin to light, or a sort of faded darkness. The air was less dense. Then the guide stopped, listened, motioned his charge to wait, went forward further, listened again, then returned.

"Mr. Kenyon, I am a-goin' to turn you loose. Don't as' me no questions an' I won't have to tell you no lies. Them 'at lives underground don't talk. You go alone. There's eyes, eyes, everywhere. If they are open, they musn't see but one; ef they do, the jig's up. When you git out turn round, an' in the sky you will see the lights o' the city. When you git thar, ef you ever do, don't stay, for the bloodhounds will be on yer track. Keep mum's the ticket. You don't know nothin' tell I

see you, ef we both live—which ain't by no means certain. You can go—but I have not loosed your hands. No, I don't need no thanks, I'm git-tin' better pay. Go, an' sell out dear ef you haf ter."

Having cut the bonds from Lawrence's hands, and put the knife in his right, his companion led the way to where the tunnel came to an abrupt termination, and he had only to clamber up a steep, and he was in what one would take for a cavern-mouth or sink-hole. Around it grew bushes and reeds, and there were also heaps of rubbish that had gathered for years. The dew glittering on the grass in the starlight was beautiful, and the air was sweet. It was a lonely spot and the knife was a comfort. As he was taking his bearings the silence was broken by the hoot of an owl close to his left. Looking up he found it came from the walls of a ruined building, and as he gazed the proportions of a tower still majestic and time-defying came out against the sky, and, recognizing the ruins of an old mission, he thought, "Those

old Jesuits loved dark and secret ways, and spared no toil to provide against surprises."

Lawrance reached his room in safety. He felt it would be wise to take the advice of his deliverer and quit the city for a time. He was pondering over the situation next morning, when he heard a knock on his door. At his invitation a man entered and stood before him who would have been a study for an artist. His hair was uncut and uncombed. His beard coarse, stubby and of a grizzly hue. His person was innocent of soap and water. His clothes were shabby, ill-matched, and without pretense of fitting. There was a stoop at the shoulders and a furtive, hunted look out of the eyes, imparted by a life of misery and criminality. Withal, he was a picture to excite commiseration. When asked to take a seat, he replied:

"Wall, I mought set down a minnit, fur I want a word wi' ye. Ye mayn't mind I wuz one o' them you wuz talkin' to out there las' night," with a jerk of the head in the direction of the Alamo,

“an’ I may say I am the chap that sot you free. I wuz one o’ that sort, but I’ve come ter tell yer I’ve quit fer good. Chris Ware is goin’ ter be sober an’ honest the rest o’ his nat’ral life; yes sir, sober an’ honest. Them two things goes together, an’ ef I’d allus been sober I’d a-been honest. When I tuck ter drink, it warn’t long tell I tuck to wuss. Sence ye said what ye did las’ night, I been a-thinkin’, an’ I made up my min’ ter turn over a leaf.

“You wuz in a close place. Them’s bad un’s. An’ I’ve got in a close place by helpin’ you out, but that’s nothin’. I bin thar before now, an’ if they finish me, which they will if they git the drap, it won’t be no big job, an’ I’ll be at the finishin’, an’ they know it. All night I been a-thinkin’ o’ my wife, what died ’bout six months ago all along o’ my bad treatment. I could hear ’er cough, an’ see ’er pale, tired face es plain es my hand. I could see my boy Chris—you’ve seen ’im, a peart boy ’e is—and hear ’im

cryin' fur 'is ma, 'at wuz all the comfort 'e had.

"You may not know what it is to have so many things you can't undo, an' ter have 'em come up before you like that. Somehow yo' words brought it all back to me, an' the sight of ye minded me of the time ye knocked me down whin ye come in on me usin' the wife rough like. Yes, I'm the chap ye floored, an' I've allus liked ye fur it. An' I 'lowed ter git even, an' I dun it las' night. An' I'm goin' ter work, an' ef I ever can do anything fur ye, let me know, fur I owe ye a sight more'n I can ever pay."

So saying, he was about to go, but Lawrance restrained him. This man had given him his liberty, if not his life. This seemed to Lawrance a liberal reward for having knocked him down only once. He was impressed with the evident sincerity of the man. Moreover, he had no idea of missing this opportunity of learning the possible whereabouts of the detective.

Questioning this fellow, Lawrance learned that the detective had become

too weak to travel as they were on their way from the borders of Mexico. His companions had stolen away and left him without notice. He had managed to get the confession from "Shocky," and they had become a little suspicious of him, and so left him. They had not been long in the city. When they reached the city their pal who was here before them had already got track of Lawrance. His clew they had followed till last night's developments.

Lawrance lost no time in making ready for his journey. In an incredibly short time after this chance interview, he was hurrying out of the city, borne by a sturdy pony. His heart was in this search. He felt, in setting out, that sense of elevation that accompanies any unselfish action. True he was interested to secure the confession of "Shocky," but, to his credit be it said, the ruling motive was the desire to find and help the detective.

In accordance with the vague directions of his informant, he took his journey to the southwest. But to

start is one thing, and, in this region of prairies that all look alike and roads that are not roads, to find your way is quite another. Before night, Lawrance had found himself far off his track many times. When he had been told to "take the plainest way," he often found that he had only succeeded in taking the newest way, and after riding ten miles, without seeing a human being, would suddenly come upon a ranch, and find that he must retrace his steps. By this process he made slow headway, and was worn out and discouraged the first day. The distance often covered without seeing a house was another discouragement, and he had to ride far into the night to find a resting-place. This day's experience was repeated with some variations, and new and graver difficulties thrown in, enough to utterly discourage any but the most resolute, particularly when there was so much indefiniteness of information on which to proceed. A week had passed before he reached the region where the detective was last supposed

to have been seen. It was a mere village, a sort of centre of supplies for ranches, made up mostly of saloons and a post-office.

After much inquiry, Lawrance made himself tolerably certain that the detective had taken the stage at this point, after being left by his companions while lying sick in the only hotel in the village. To this he had secured access by his weakly appearance and plausible manner. He had left there a few days after by stage, but for what point no one knew. It was supposed he was making his way to San Antonio. In hope of more definite information, he waited for the stage, which made a weekly trip. This delayed him another three days. When it came, there was a new driver who could give no information whatever. Lawrance only grew in his determination as the difficulties thickened. He felt more and more that he must succeed. So he set out, with the purpose to inquire at every possible place along the way. At the end of the first day's journey, no discoveries had been made.

In the afternoon of the following day, there fell one of those floods of rain that autumn so frequently brings to this region. Streams whose beds had been dry an hour before began to fill and became raging torrents, sweeping everything before them. Lawrance was far from any habitation when this storm arose. He soon saw by a line of trees in the distance, as he slowly made his way through the clinging black mud of the prairie, that he was nearing a stream. When he came to its banks, it presented a threatening aspect. With a deafening roar it swept its murky current between full banks. It was enough to deter one with a stouter heart than Lawrance possessed, but somehow his old irresolution had forsaken him. The purpose before him had called up all the strength of will of which he was capable. Indeed, he found a sort of satisfaction in the dangers and sacrifices attending this search. Difficulties were not to be thought of, dangers not to be reckoned with. Plunging the spurs into

the flanks of the rebellious pony, he forced him into the boiling flood. It was only for a brief space that the pony could maintain his footing. To swim across that current was impossible; to swim with it was only a degree less difficult. The pony battled bravely, but it was of no use. Horse and rider were at the mercy of the angry current. Lawrance saw above the swirling flood that now and then engulfed him, a man on the opposite bank from where he entered striving to keep pace with him as he was whirled down the stream. That was the last he knew. He was clinging to the neck of the horse, choked by the waters, in his ears the voice of a thousand thunders, something struck him with fearful force, his hold gave way, and he was only half conscious of a last frantic struggle, an effort to cry for help, a swift vision of the past, and then—oblivion.

CHAPTER XXII.

IN SEARCH OF HEALTH.

On the banks of the San Antonio river, which flows or rather winds serpent-like through the quaint old city that bears its name, there stands a spacious and beautiful home. The house sets well back from the street in a grove of pecan-trees, which are draped with graceful festoons of swaying moss. The river makes one of its sudden turns at this point, and so is visible from the rear and two sides of the house, and even from the great porch on the front its gleaming current can be seen gracefully turning the point above. On its banks, caladiums, bananas and waving rushes grow in great abundance and give a tropical appearance to the scene. The large yard is covered with grass still green and fresh, though November has already put his coating of sober

brown on more northern latitudes. A Marechal Neil rose clammers the entire width of the front porch and is still enwreathed with a perfect wealth of this queen of roses. A row of chrysanthemums on either side of the walk is arrayed in a gorgeous variety of color.

Surely this is a place to lose one's care and dream sweet dreams. The air is soft and balmy and seems to rush with delicious freedom into the expanding lungs. It is neither too warm for comfort nor too cool for outdoor delight and is never still nor silent, but sings of health as it flies over endless stretches of prairie on wings still redolent of gambols with the crested billows of the Gulf. The sky is high and soft and of deepest blue, with that peculiar welcome to the upward look that seems to permit the rejoicing eye to penetrate its depths and rest in its hospitable bosom. It is that most soothing hour of twilight, and on the front porch of this home are four people, two old people and two young ladies, and sitting by choice and by

courtesy on the steps another whom we shall soon recognize. The conversation is concerning the city in which we find them.

"And so you already confess that San Antonio is a great deal nicer place than your slow-going Vandalia, eh?" This was spoken by the old gentleman to the individual on the steps. The latter promptly replied:

"Dis pow'ful nice, sho; I boun' say dat, but, laws-a-massy, what you gwin' say fur dese mud huts settin' squar on de street wid no mo' ya'd dan er tater-celler, an' so low yo' kin mi'nigh salt yo' cows on de ruff? Stop do', I furgit de cows' hawns so long dey cain't git thoo de streets, ef you call 'em streets, 'bout ez wide ez er pig-path and ez crooked ez er fishin'-worm wid er bad case er de colic. You come to Vandalia, an' we show you streets what's got room ter git a good bref in. Den you got de mos' onsplainable people here I ebber see in all my bawn days. Dey ain't black, an' dey ain't yaller, an' dey ain' white, but sorter 'twixt an' 'tween. Dey hats look like er fodder

stack; dey ties dey red bandanner roun' dey wais' stid er roun' dey head lak er sensible pusson, an' dey cyar' er kiverlid roun' dey shoulders, des lak dey dun an' got outer bed an' furgit ter leab de kiver. Dey don' know nuthin', kase dey won' answer er decent pusson's question, but dey shake dey haid an' mutter sump'n' ain' got no sense in it."

The reader has recognized the familiar speech of Aunt Lylie, for it is none other. Those four on the porch are Capt. and Mrs. Melton, Dora's uncle and aunt, Amelia Bramwell and Dora herself. These friends of ours have found their way to this far city of the Southwest by a very natural chain of circumstances. Dora's need of change for health's sake, the fame of this climate, and the residence of her uncle in this city explain it. Dora succeeded in persuading her friend to accompany her, and Aunt Lylie would not hear of being left behind. They found a warm welcome and a delightful home.

The young ladies found a charming novelty in their surroundings, which Capt. Melton never tired of dilating upon and enhancing with incident and history as he drove them from point to point. They spent much time loitering along the banks of the river, lulled almost in spite of themselves into forgetfulness of care. Even Aunt Lylie was deeply impressed, but she would not give way to enthusiasm. She was not altogether pleased with the unbounded pleasure of the young ladies. It did not sound to her patriotic ears altogether loyal to Vandalia. With her it was Vandalia, then Heaven, with no intermediate stages. Going upward, the celestial city was the next and only one on that side; the rest of the habitable universe lay below in various downward degrees. Many a good-natured tilt did she and Capt. Melton have on the merits of the two cities, much to his amusement, for it afforded a fine opportunity to test the flavor of the old negro's peculiar wit.

Capt. Melton owned a large cattle-ranch about forty miles west of the city, which, by the way, is a very short distance in that country, where space is peculiarly lavish of room. His only son, whom he called Jack, attended to the ranch, and the father now and then paid him a visit, going out with supplies in a large covered hack kept for the purpose. He entertained his visitors with many graphic stories of ranch life, which filled their minds with pictures of a calling presenting a lively contrast to their cotton and corn culture at home. They longed to see this strange world with their own eyes, and were promised a visit to Capt. Melton's ranch, much to their delight. Their life here was all that could be desired, and the days sped by with quick and lithesome tread, leaving behind a growing strength and cheer. Young hearts are easily wooed by strange skies and give ready and hearty response to the charm of novelty. The process of healing is slower for hearts than for bodies; but, nevertheless, time and

change work wonders even in the cure of those ailments that are beyond the reach of physic. Both these bruised hearts began to heal, and the sunshine of hope began to break through the clouds and spread itself over their lives.

CHAPTER XXIII.

A LONE GRAVE BY THE WAYSIDE.

"Be up early to-morrow and in readiness to start betimes, for it is a long drive you are to take," said Capt. Melton, the evening before the trip to the ranch, "that is, unless you want to camp out at night."

"Oh, wouldn't that be fine! By all means, let's camp out. What say you, Amelia?" And Dora fairly clapped her hands with delight at the idea.

"I haven't as much fancy for novelty as you have, my dear, and am not sure that sleeping under the open sky is an experiment one would go a thousand miles to seek. I have a great liking for houses, but I confess this once I am not averse to this project. But perhaps Capt. Melton would not approve."

"Oh, by all means, Miss Amelia," said Capt. Melton, "nothing would be

more to my mind, and had I imagined it would please, I should have proposed it at once."

"It would be such an experience to tell when we get back home, and then, for my part, I have a natural fondness for the company of the stars," said Dora.

"But perhaps Aunt Lylie would not agree," said Capt. Melton, turning towards that worthy personage as he spoke. She had been listening to the conversation with every indication of the most eager interest, but she had not comprehended a word, except in the vaguest sort of way. She was watching the dawning light on Dora's face, and hailing the new enthusiasm, which was a sign to her that the old life was returning. She was like one worn out with watching for the return of a ship that has been long at sea when the home-coming sail is first sighted. Had one listened closely, he might have heard a whispered "bless de Lawd."

"Whut you 'sputin' 'bout, Mars' Cap'in? I's gittin' so ole I dun an' fergit ter tek notice."

"We weren't disputing, Aunt Lylie, but just deciding whether or not we should camp out to-morrow night. The young ladies are willing if you are."

"Well, I don' 'zac'ly know. I ain' no hand ter be projickin' wid sich. Who's gwin' keep off dem kyutuses I been hear you tell 'bout?"

"You need have no fears of the coyotes," replied Capt. Melton, striving to keep a straight face despite Aunt Lylie's grotesque pronunciation of the name of the wild dog of the Texas prairie. "They always make such a hideous noise before they attack you that you have a chance to get out of the way. When you hear them, you have only to climb a tree, and remain till they go away."

"How's er ole body lak' me gwine clim' er tree? I ain' niver done dat when I's young. I'm jes' ez good ez cotch now, ef dat's de game."

By a little coaxing and argument, Aunt Lylie was somewhat reassured, and agreed to take the risk for Dora's sake; and so it was settled they would dine at home and then start for a

point about midway between the home and the ranch.

Early in the afternoon, the hack drew up in front of the house, and Capt. Melton, Amelia, Dora, and Aunt Lylie climbed in and were whirled away in high expectation of a pleasant drive. The air was bracing and the sky without a cloud. Drawn by a pair of spirited ponies to whose nimble feet space seemed merely a plaything, they sped across the prairie. There was not much to break the monotony of the journey; only once or twice a deer bounded across the road, if road the track across the level prairie could be called. Then Dora lost herself in excitement and showed some of her old-time girlish enthusiasm.

At twilight they found water for their ponies and struck camp for the night. It was the work of a few minutes to hobble the horses, gather some sticks, kindle a fire and make a pot of coffee for their supper with water that was all the better for being boiled and flavored with coffee.

The firelight on the glistening foliage of the live-oaks, the silent silver of the stars in a cloudless sky, the monotone of the winds that in these parts are never weary, the endless sweep of level prairie, constituted a combination that would have charmed less vivid imaginations than theirs. Capt. Melton had taken pains to work on this predominating faculty of Aunt Lylie by exciting tales of life in camp and adventures with wolves, Indians, and the like, to which she listened with wide-eyed credulity. By bedtime she was excited beyond the possibility of sleep. It was arranged that Dora and Amelia should sleep in the hack, Aunt Lylie under it, while Capt. Melton simply lay down on the grass.

By the time talking had ceased a great owl in a tree near by smote the surrounding silence with a vigorous and hair-lifting hoo-hoo! This was too much for Aunt Lylie's already excited nerves, and she started up, exclaiming: "What in de name er goodness is dat, Mars Cap'in? For de Lawd's sake, jes' lis'en at 'im."

When it was explained, she enjoyed the laugh with them, but maintained that "he mus' er got 'is onuthly voice f'um ole Nick hisse'f." They had not yet fallen asleep when a huge bull began to bellow not far away, the low rumble of his challenge sounding like the roar of distant thunder and ending with the combination of an exaggerated scream and an overgrown sob. Aunt Lylie sat up and held her breath. At the next trumpet-blast from this monarch of the prairie, that went careering through space like the trump of doom (which indeed it was to her), she straightened up, almost lifting the hack from the ground, exclaiming:

"Is you-all gwine lie still when ole Nick hisse'f a-comin' arter you."

The burst of merriment that greeted her ears was reassuring, for it led her to hope they might come out of this alive. But still she mentally vowed and orally declared that she would never again "git cotch in no sich non-sensible fix, fur," said she, "I ain't been brung up to no sich." No

amount of bantering or coaxing could bring her to lie down again. She sat by the hack and kept sleepless watch for the next danger. It was late in the night when it came. If the reader has never heard the rallying cry of a pack of coyotes, the writer can give him no idea of the blood-curdling chorus that breaks out suddenly like pandemonium run mad, shrill staccato, tremolo, crescendo, as if the throats of a thousand demons were clamoring for blood. The coyote is a ventriloquist; he always seems a great deal nearer than he is.

In a twinkling, Aunt Lylie was in the hack, crying: "Laws-a-massy, honey, dis ain' no place fur us! Don' you hear? Lan' sake, jis lis'en at dat! Hit's dem kyutuses huntin' bones ter pick, an' here's one ain' gwine set still an' 'vite 'em ter come an' hep dey-se'ves. I wish I's in Vandalia, whar dey ain' no sich onuthly varmints, dat I does!" This time she was still harder to pacify. Shades of Houston Travis and the rest! Had those

worthies heard the abuse heaped on Texas by her tongue, made eloquent by fear, they would have felt it was a country not worth fighting for. The consequence was that our party did not get much sleep, but had an immense deal of fun, which compensated them, and on the whole the camping episode was voted a great success, not unanimously, however, for Aunt Lylie declared it was fit only for wild Indians. As between "ole Nick" and "dem kyutuses" there was not much choice, and she was morally certain that a camper in Texas was not left to that choice even, for both might pounce upon him at any moment.

They reached the ranch about noon. Everything was in readiness to receive them. The comfortable, capacious, one-story house was neatly kept by a brisk Mexican woman, who had put every nook and corner at its best in honor of the expected guests.

"Cousin Jack" was not by far the Bohemian they had expected to see. So far from being the roistering sav-

age that the cowboy is represented as being in literature, he was a gentleman in leather overalls as truly as ever wore shining broadcloth. He could rope a steer or grace a drawing-room with equal ease. He soon showed himself a capable host, accommodating himself to the whims and fancies of his guests, and divining what would contribute to their pleasure with a tact born of a generous desire to please. With this good-natured, keen-witted, handsome cavalier of the pastures, the young ladies were soon on the best of terms, and the time passed delightfully in strolling about the place, reading, and especially in horseback-riding. For this latter exercise there was abundance of space in the pasture of seventy thousand acres, and plenty of horses, and, we may also add, liberal inclination on the part of the guests and host.

On the afternoon of the third day after their arrival, as they were having their accustomed gallop, Jack suddenly reigned in his horse, and bidding them wait till he returned, rode

off toward a huge steer that lifted his wide horns warily two hundred yards away. Jack unloosed his lariat as he rode. The steer was away with a defiant toss of his head before half the distance had been covered, and went tearing across the prairie like a deer. Jack touched his pony with the spur and that animal needed no second warning, but seeing the game was up, leaped to the chase like an unleashed greyhound. Throwing his nose straight out, and giving every muscle to the chase, he sped over the bosom of the grass-grown prairie like a swallow. Gradually the space between horse and steer was diminishing, when with keen instinct, the steer tore like a tornado through a chapparal thicket where it was impossible for any horseman to follow. The horse, apparently without the use of the rein, circled round the obstruction without breaking his speed. The steer, instead of passing though the bushes to the opposite side, turned and came out at right angles from where he entered and then turned back on his track.

By the time Jack had made the circuit, a considerable distance had been put between him and the brute, by this time mad with fright and fury. As he turned into a straight run for his game, the horse seemed to gather up and throw all his energies into the chase, and his rider partook of his spirit, as he leaned far forward and gave him the spur. The space lessened. The horse with great leaps seems to be already rejoicing in his triumph, and now the lasso is in the air, and is cutting swift circles above Jack's head. Now the opportune moment has come, and rising in his stirrups, Jack hurls the lasso through the air. The aim is true, it has caught, the rope tightens, a few short leaps and the horse comes to a standstill, with feet planted firm in front. The great brute stumbles, is down. Quick as thought, Jack leaps to the ground, rushes upon his prey with another rope, and in an inconceivably short time the steer is helplessly bound.

The two women had not spoken one word during this exciting chase. Only

when it was safely over, Amelia said, "How daring he is," with a tremor of admiration in her voice.

As Jack galloped to their side, he said simply, "That fellow escaped us at the round-up, and now he must wait for the men to come and take him in. But had I missed my aim, you would have been in danger, as he was coming directly this way." They scolded him a little for his recklessness, and praised him a good deal for his courage and skill, and he must have been either less or more than human if he had not expected and enjoyed both.

They rode on towards the west, Dora leading the way in a smart gallop, her cousin and Amelia bringing up the rear. These latter appeared to find in each other agreeable companionship. Dora came upon a gate and of necessity waited for the others to come up. She was told they had reached the limit of her uncle's ranch. On a rise a half-mile away they could see a house which belonged to an old German who owned the adjoining ranch.

Dora insisted on riding that far. She was enjoying the freedom, the movement, the sunlight, the scenery.

Just before reaching the house, Dora, still a short way ahead, saw to the right of the road, amid a group of live-oaks, a new grave. Her quick sympathies and lively imagination drew her to the spot. The two saw her leap from her pony, and when they reached her side, she was kneeling on the fresh dirt with her hands tightly clasped, her cheeks pale, her lips compressed, gazing at a name cut in rude letters on the wooden board at the head. They looked and read "L. Kenyon." Amelia understood, and kneeling by Dora's side placed an arm gently round her and spoke no word, but only sobbed. Then responsive tears stole down Dora's cheeks.

The cousin, touched by the scene and silenced by the mystery and pathos of it, moved aside and with a fine instinct of propriety busied himself with the horses. When they arose Dora was almost calm. Amelia was

silent, for it was not an occasion for speech. Dora said, "Let us go yonder," pointing to the house. She and Amelia went arm in arm, while Jack followed, wondering what it all meant. They found only an elderly German woman. She was kind. She bustled about with every possible show of courtesy. She and her husband lived a secluded life, and she barely knew Jack Melton by sight.

None of the visitors spoke German, and she not a word of English. They managed to make her understand they were interested in the new grave. She produced an envelope on which the name "Lawrance Kenyon, San Antonio, Texas," was written. This, she led them to understand, was all they had found on his person. This they were cheerfully permitted to keep.

Dora was eager to see what the contents might be and she opened it at once. It contained a legal paper, which proved to be a confession of the burning of the store of Melton and Ford. Dora's burden was lifted when she saw it was the confession of another

to the crime with which her lover was charged. This was a joy to her in the midst of her grief.

After the first paroxysm of grief, and the revelation contained in the papers, Dora dried her tears and took leave of the place. Pausing at the grave, she laid on it a sprig of evergreen that she had worn on her bosom and said to Amelia, "Tell Cousin Jack," then mounted and rode away. Only a brief fragmentary explanation had been made to Jack at the cottage.

As they rode homeward, Amelia told Jack the story. She did not make it clear as to Lawrance's leaving Vandalia. It was not clear to her. She had not known the part Roswell had played. What Jack said to her it is not our business to know, but we can easily believe it is a dangerous thing to have another's love-story told you by a lovely young woman as you ride across broad prairies through the slant sun into the twilight.

CHAPTER XXIV.

LASO CONTENTS WITH FLOOD.

The lasso, that much underrated instrument of Western civilization, sometimes figures in a much higher capacity than mere herding of cattle. When the cowboy, like the ancient shepherd boy, learns to put faith in the instrument with which he is most expert, he has learned a lesson of rare wisdom. Then a lasso may save a life, as a sling once saved a nation. When Lawrance was swept from his saddle in the swollen river, the man we saw on the shore was awaiting his opportunity. When the frantic hand was uplifted for a brief moment, as if to seize the sweet light, like the leap of the lightning the obedient rope flew to its mark and caught Lawrance by the wrist. When he came back to consciousness, he found himself lying on a pallet, under a huge live-oak, sur-

rounded by half a dozen cowboys, as many ponies, a few dogs, and the simple furnishings of a camp on the prairie.

His first awakening was to the sound of a familiar song. The voice of a man was singing "Nearer, my God, to Thee," and there was peculiar sweetness in the strains as they stole out on the evening air. No cathedral choir ever chanted such harmonies as the ear of Lawrance found in the unskilled singing of that cowboy. Back to the days of his boyhood, back to home and mother, to the hiss and crackle of the pine-wood fire and the shadows dancing on the wall, to the blossoming meadow in springtime and the days of a guileless heart whereon were no scars, was he borne on the wings of the song. He scarcely knew whether he was dead or alive. Looking up he saw the huge branches of the live-oak swaying in the breeze that freshened from the gulf, and through them gleamed the first faint stars like so many signals of peace. Then he knew he lived in the

flesh. Had this not been sufficient, he would have been convinced beyond all conjecture that he was not yet among the celestial inhabitants, for the singer was greeted by language such as angels are not supposed to use. It was evident they were not a unit on the subject of sacred things.

"Say, bud, give us a rest." "Will mamma's boy let up?" "Say, if you don't shut up that music-box, I'll break it, pardner." "Whar's yer text, parson?" But the singing continued till one of the boys, slipping up behind the singer, poured part of the contents of a bucket of water on his head, in mock baptism of the "singing Methodist."

This was greeted with a roar of laughter. Then, as the youth quietly wiped the water from his face without any show of resentment, the rest seemed to relent. "Tim, I be blamed ef that ain't a shame," said one to the man who had perpetrated the joke, "an' ef it was me I'd knock the fillin' out of you." Then turning to the aggrieved boy, the same speaker said:

"Bob, why in the deuce didn't you knock him into the middle of next week?"

There was no response to this, but the guying went on. At length the youth found his speech. It was calm and gentle. There was not a touch of anger or impatience in it. But it was manly and compelled attention. He said, "Boys, I don't believe you think I'm afraid, or that if any of you were in danger I should be wanting, but I am not going to fight nor quarrel, for better reason than fear. Besides, I do not wonder that you laugh at me. It is what I ought to expect. It is what I have done many a time myself, for I did not understand. When I understood, I quit ridiculing; when you understand, you will quit. I once saw some boys laugh at another for crying, because they thought it was for the loss of a top or ball. But when he told them his mother had just died, they cried with him. You laugh at me when I sing, because you do not know what makes me sing. You think it strange I do not fight, because you do not

know what keeps me from fighting. That is why I say you do not understand. I was not thinking of you at all as I sang, but my mind was back at home. On a maple-crowned hill far away there is a sacred spot. It is a family burying-ground. My mother sleeps there. My father and older brother went to the war. They never came back. My mother survived till one year ago to-day. Before she died she called me to her and said, 'Robert, God has spared me to see you almost a man. Now I am going. The only legacy I have to leave you is my blessing and my prayers. Live to deserve the respect of your fellow man, but do not despair if they despise you. You go out into the world to win your way. I can not go with you, but God will. The only thing you have to fear is the thing that will offend Him.' And then she was still. I went out among the shadows. The stars were coming out. Their light was an offense to me. The air was balmy, but its balm was bitter to me. It was such a night as this, and I resolved as I knelt on the sod

to take my mother's advice. The next day at the grave the neighbors sang that song you heard me sing just now. It comes back to me when I think of the scene, and I was there just now, a thousand miles away, and something in my heart made me sing. Boys, were I to be angry, I should belie my religion and fail of my mother's teaching."

Lawrance listened to this recital with deep feeling. It was a history much like his own. It moved him accordingly, as if a voice had come to him from the grave. He could not help asking himself if he were equally loyal to his training and to the deeper convictions of his nature. He despised himself as he measured his life by that of this unknown cowboy. The rest had silently listened. Lawrance expected an outburst of ridicule, but it did not come. He noticed that one of them busied himself at once replenishing the fire, another took a bucket and went to the creek to bring water, and a third found diversion in looking after the horses. When all

were seated again, the same young man who had so valiantly won the field before proposed to read to them from a book he had with him. Some time before he had been to the city and met a young lady at the home of Capt. Melton, and she had given him the book to read in camp. She was a niece of Capt. Melton's and was on a visit from Vandalia. Melton! Vandalia! Lawrance managed to listen without any sign that he heard, though at sound of those names his heart "knocked at the seated ribs" and every nerve quivered with excitement. He could scarcely credit his senses. There was an almost irresistible impulse to start up and ask, "Was her name Dora?" But by a supreme effort he restrained himself, and listened with inexpressible eagerness while the young man dilated on the charms of Miss Melton and her kindness.

"What was she like, Bob? Pretty, was she, and got next to your flutter-mill, hey?" asked Tim. Tim would have shuddered had he known how

near that question came to getting his own "flutter-mill" smashed by the "stranger."

"Well, I can't say about that, but I'm sure she had something about her better than beauty, something that makes a fellow want to lift his hat and talk low. There was none of your sickening airs, but a simple, straightforward, homespun way. As you would say, Tim, simply business and no foolin'."

"Yes, I seem to catch on. One of these ponies that can go the gaits but don't go in for showin' off. Jus' makes straight for the right cow every time, but bucks on the race-track, an' 'ud kick a painted buggy into kindlin' wood in a jiffy. That's what I like in folks. I'd as lief have Pedro Garcia's yellow cur about me as one of these female creatures that get themselves up in their crinoline, and curl-papers, and flummery and furbelows just for the drawin'-room, and then mince and giggle and say nothin' in a perfect stream for an hour. Makes you wish you didn't have a female ancestor on

either side the family for generations back. But boys, I know one that looks a fellow in the face and says something every whack, whether she speaks or not, and makes you feel like you want to sit down and grow and grow in her presence, and when she's gone, you can hear a voice callin' on you for days to get up and be some-thin'. That's why I'm here; but we'll leave that to be continued in the next number."

"Well, I should not have put it that way, but you are not far from the truth. The fact is, I was so impressed with her goodness that I scarcely thought of her beauty. But I remember now, she has sunny hair, a little disorderly about the brow, a blue eye that you like to look at a second time, and a face—well, a face so perfect that you don't bother about details. She brought this book all the way from Vandalia, and gave it to me, because, she said, we must be lonely, and it would be company for us."

Lawrance had been struggling with the conviction that the subject of this

conversation was the one Miss Melton that he had known or cared to know until he heard the description, and then all doubt vanished, for he was certain there was no other like her. He was in the presence of one who had recently looked into her face and listened to her voice. How he longed to ask questions, to learn all—why she was there, whether she was still in the city, and how long she would stay. But quick came the thought that there could be no interest to him in knowing, and no good in revealing what must remain to these men and all men a buried secret. So he lay quietly with every nerve a-flutter and thoughts stirring in his brain that were not for words. The fact that she had been in the city clung to his mind, that he had been so near her and had not known it.

The rude supper was now ready. The cowboys forgot the subject of their conversation in the more interesting process of eating, for which they were as thoroughly qualified as health, pure air and hard labor could

render them. Lawrance did not forget; how could he?

What did it mean to him? Was it not all one to him whether she were near or far? It is not distance that divides hearts. Distance had not altered his heart, being near him could not affect hers. So long as she cared not for him, there might as well be continents between them. Yet there was something inexpressibly delightful in the thought that she was nearer than he had known, and all his soul went out in a longing to get sight of her. Yet perhaps it was best he should not. He was drawn irresistibly toward the city, and yet sober reflection told him he had best flee from it, since he dared not make himself known, and no good could come of seeing her. Impulse or reason, which shall prevail? Long he pondered, and as long found no resting-place for his thoughts.

The cowboys were kind, they could not be gentle. Their homely speeches, their rude familiarity, their uncouth manners, could not conceal the native kindliness of their natures; indeed,

these were signs, the only signs they knew how to give, of their friendly disposition. Of fine speeches they knew nothing, of fine manners less if possible, but in fine deeds they were not wanting. When it was found that a fever had set in, and that he could not possibly resume his journey yet, they nursed him with unabated attention, His heart turned toward the city now, and he persuaded himself he would not for some time be strong enough to continue his search. He felt he had left something of his old self on the other side of that stream, and in that terrible moment when all seemed lost to him, he had seen in one swift, awful vision the meaning of life as never before. He had faced life's issues where there were no subterfuges nor sophistries, but only cold, bare, cruel realities, and he came from the revelation with new and higher ideals. All his views of life had been taken hitherto looking forward, only this once he had one quick glimpse of it looking backward. Life viewed from the beginning is one thing; life

viewed from the ending is quite another. To-morrow is never understood until it becomes yesterday. To stand at the dawn and watch the rose tint fade into the white glory of noontide while every pulse beats high with hope is sweet, but also deceptive; to stand where the day wanes into darkness and see the fading of the light in which we have wrought and reveled, and realize that we are facing the finished and irrevocable record, is awful, but it is also sacredly and faithfully real. Once that vision falls on the soul, it fixes its stamp and furnishes thereafter the standard by which life is to be tried. That which will not stand the test of this backward look, which will not glow transplendent in the calm and deepening twilight, is but the chaff which the wind driveth away. When Lawrance turned homeward, there was a seriousness in the tenor of his thoughts that was new, and, whether he knew it or not, he had crossed a stream on life's highway that he could never recross.

There was also in his thoughts that which he had long tried in vain to put out of them. That which had been awakened in his heart could not accurately be named hope; perhaps it was only a yearning that rose up to fight again with despair. One thing was once more clear to him, and that was that no time or space or circumstance could overlay or efface the image of Dora so that it would not still be the chief treasure of his heart; and no ambition or toil so usurp the mind that the sound of her name would not command all the forces of his being, as a war-cry will arouse an army from slumber. There remained one hope as to Dora; that he might clear himself in her eyes from any suspicion of crime. It was, he tried to persuade himself, the only hope he cherished. Who shall say there did not linger about this a troop of shadowy, vague, unuttered hopes? Not he, for we are not judges of ourselves. Hope dies hard, and where the twin sister, love, abides, hope is in calling distance. But of this one hope he pondered much.

Could he but secure those proofs, meant for her originally, courts and juries might do their worst. If he were only innocent in her eyes the world might go its way. Since this hope was not now near to realization, he told himself a thousand times, it was in vain he drew near by each rod of advance to his idol of the past. Yet his heart refused to be cold and accept the comfortless reality which common sense, that pitiless tyrant that after all is sometimes no sense at all, kept on thrusting upon it. In spite of all his dreary conclusions, his heart glowed and thrilled with a nameless rapture, that seemed to deepen as he approached the city. What is that in us that makes us cling and cling to a happiness, even when it seems clean gone from us? Is it a prophecy of immortality, a promise of the compensations of eternity, a germ that shall at last flower and fruit on the now barren soil of our earthly disappointments?

CHAPTER XXV.

THE BREAKING OF THE CLOUDS.

The visit to the ranch was ended. The discovery of the grave broke the spell of enjoyment completely, and three days later it was a very disconsolate party that made its way back to the city. Dora's sadness was deep and genuine, but it was tempered by the fact that she had secured the proof of Lawrance's innocence. Also there was compensation in the very realization of certainty. There is much in knowing the full weight you have to carry, that you may properly adjust yourself to it. Dora had now reached that point where she saw all the waste and barrenness of the future. There was no longer that harassing uncertainty that oscillates between hope and despair, between resistance and resignation. Amelia was surprised at the calmness and patience with which

her friend faced her new discovery. It was more a settled melancholy than a violent grief that dominated the chastened spirit.

When Aunt Lylie had been informed of their melancholy discovery, she was affected by it in a way that others had not been. She was pained for Dora's sake, but there was a keener pain than that. That grave was a stern and grim impediment to her faith. She had always contended they would find Lawrence. For that she had prayed and trusted. Her confidence was not easily shaken but this was a severe test. She had relied on an inward impression and the facts seemed to contradict that testimony. For the first time in many years she retired that night without praying. She was not in a state of rebellion, but she was in a state of perplexity and dangerously near the border-land of doubt.

Not many days after their return to the city, she started to the post-office at least half a mile from Capt. Mel-

ton's residence. Passing along on her way thither by a street she did not usually travel, she suddenly stopped in front of a barber-shop, and stood with open mouth and expanding eyes till two or three disgusted pedestrians had run against her, and then, as if unconscious of onlookers, made a dash for the door, exclaiming, "Bless de Lawd!" upsetting a spittoon and endangering the life of a man who was undergoing the torture of having a crop of beard of two weeks growth in the sun and weather of ranch life mowed from his face, threw her arms around—Ben.

It is useless to say two hearts were happy. It is to Ben's credit that he did not resent the unconventional enthusiasm of his simple old mammy, though barbers and customers were greatly amused. He got himself excused and retired with her into a room in the rear where they might talk. Ben was as surprised to see her as she to see him. He soon explained to her that he had been employed by a man from San Antonio with a drove of

horses, and had been persuaded to return to that city with him when he had disposed of his drove. He had found employment in this shop and by industry and sobriety was getting on well.

That in which Aunt Lylie was most interested was the information that Ben had to give concerning Lawrance. He had been in that very shop and recognized Ben, and they had talked together. It had not been a month since he had seen Lawrance. He was surprised and grieved to hear of the finding of his grave, but recalled the fact that he was anything but well when he saw him. When Aunt Lylie left him it was understood that Ben was to busy himself till they should meet again next day in search of the place where Lawrance had boarded, and for any other information he might gain about him. There was a hope in her mind that she might discover that in connection with Lawrance's life in the city which would be a comfort to the heart of Dora. She had, in her ignorance of many

things, that womanly wisdom that divines the deep, delicate needs of the heart. She felt that any little proofs of his devotion, of his fidelity to his first love, or even praise of his life from the lips of strangers, or other tokens of his worth, would be to Dora's bruised spirit like dew on mown grass. Shall we say this was her only hope? We dare not, for whether she ever formulated it or not, there still lingered a glow of that hope that had sustained her so long, of one day seeing Lawrence and Dora happy. Of course, she dared not whisper it to herself, but it clung about her simple heart as the afterglow of sunset lingers in the sky, or like the perfume of flowers clinging to the shattered vase. Shall we blame her? This hope had wrought itself in with the most sacred impulses of her life; it had struck its roots into the deepest, divinest soil of her nature. It had linked itself so with her faith, and become so a part of her religion that to destroy the one threatened the other—when she could no longer pray for that, she could not pray at all.

However unreasoning, even insane, such a hope might be, who shall blame her if it clung to her still?

When she returned to the Melton home they had been waiting long for letters from home. Then she realized that she had not been to the office at all, and exclaimed: "Ef dat don' beat all. I 'clar ter gracious, dis town so stractin' hit mek er niggah lose dey haid." Then she turned and went back, leaving Amelia wondering what had come over her.

That night Aunt Lylie prayed long and fervently. Her faith had received a new impulse. She began to see dimly. It is easier to believe when there is some light on the eyes. Such is human weakness. Aunt Lylie kept her secret. Since the return from the ranch she had slept little and eaten less. Now that she had found Ben and gotten trace of Lawrance, sleep was impossible. The flame of life was burning too brightly to be smothered by sleep, if not too brightly to last.

Next day she found an excuse to go to see Ben. He had been diligent

and had found out where Lawrance had boarded. He learned there that he was often away several days at a time. At this time he had been away for many days, and it was not known where he had gone. She resolved to go and make inquiries about him and quiet her conscience by doing her best. She had but a short distance to go, and somehow she felt it was not much more she should do for Dodie. And so she went on her search heedless of all else. She had been gone long enough to create anxiety when she turned the corner in front of the Melton residence at a most undignified and—we beg her pardon—a most ungainly speed. Her skirts were flapping wildly and her white handkerchief, partially escaped from its moorings, was flying over her shoulder like a torn sail in a tempest. She paid no attention to a half-dozen street Arabs who started up from as many different places along the way, and followed, shouting all sorts of ridiculous phrases. It was as the chirp of sparrows in the path of a conqueror. When a heart

has been full of a purpose, a high, unselfish purpose, and that purpose is accomplished, what avails the ridicule of a regiment more or less of the thoughtless. Aunt Lylie was lifted into a region where praise and blame are both alike, because they are not heard. She bounded up the front steps, crying, "Whar's Dodie? Whar's Dodie? I's—foun'—'im. I's foun'—'im."

Hearing the sound of a door flung wide, and the falling of a chair that dared obstruct this triumphal march, Dora came out into the hall just in time to catch a glimpse of this white and black thundercloud of emotion, and then to be caught in its embrace. She felt the pressure of arms that had so often shielded her from pain and loneliness, and the quick heaving of a bosom that never harbored any but a tender thought of her, while her astonished ears caught the fragmentary outbursts of the glad tidings: "I tole yer—we gwine fin' 'im—I seed 'im—wid—dese—eyes." There was no chance for interruptions. Dora was

at a loss to consider whether Aunt Lylie was beside herself, or the story true. She drew the old negro into her room and gave her a chair, into which she fell breathless, unable to speak for some time. Dora flew to call Amelia, who was walking by the riverside, and brought her to Aunt Lylie. Her coming was the signal for another outburst. Amelia listened and heard her say: "Mars Lawrance an' Ben, too, I foun' 'em," and caught Dora in her arms, and they two mingled their tears of joy.

When they turned their attention to Aunt Lylie again, she was leaning against the side of the chair, her hands hanging limp, her eyes closed—she had fainted. The excitement of the last few days, this sudden joy, together with the headlong run, had been too much for her. She was helped to a bed and simple restoratives soon brought a change. When she was able to speak, she opened her eyes, looked up at Dora, who was bending over her, and said with ineffable ten-

derness: "Dodie—ole—black mam-mie's—wuk—dun, an' dun."

They dared not question her, she was too feeble and so they must wait. She closed her eyes and slept. Dora drew the shades and leaving Aunt Lylie in charge of her aunt, Mrs. Melton, she and Amelia stole out and sitting on the river-bank talked or thought the tidings over together. They believed Aunt Lylie. They could not understand how there could be any mistake about the grave, but less could they understand how the old servant could be misled. Dora said little. She seemed to be listening. She was listening to the music in her heart. She could not think nor plan, but only rejoice. She was not now in a world of fact, only in a world of feeling. That world that has no past, no future, but is one eternal now. It has neither memory nor hope, but revels in realization. As they sat with clasped hands, the river murmured among the flags along the bank, and the lithe wind whispered through the boughs overhead, and the

brown leaves danced merrily about their feet. Amelia made out in her own mind this much: As soon as Aunt Lylie could tell it, they must find out where Lawrance was and that she would then undertake the pleasing task of bringing him and Dora together.

When they were able to gather the full story, it was less pleasing than they had supposed. Aunt Lylie had really found Lawrance but she had found him in prison. When she searched out the house in which he boarded, she learned he had been arrested that morning and was in the custody of the police. She had made her way to the jail, where she was permitted to see the prisoner. She said little to him, only enough to make sure of his identity and to give him to understand she had been in search of him. Then she had made that head-long rush for home, bearing her tidings.

As to what Lawrance had said to her, he was too much astonished by her brief visit to say anything, in fact

the full import of it did not dawn on him until he heard her voice come back from the corridors of the prison in declaration of his innocence and in vigorous denunciation of the injustice being done him.

He had made up his mind to await patiently the course of the law, and meet the charges where they originated. He had little hope of the aid of the detective now, and even his new friend who called himself Chris Ware had disappeared from the scene. There was one consolation in it all. Dora was here and would not be in Vandalia to witness his shame. But when Aunt Lylie appeared on the scene even that consolation was shattered. The visit of that individual and the few excited words that she uttered led him to believe that Dora believed him innocent, and that she would perhaps be willing to befriend him. But at that thought all the bitterness of his disappointment came back to him, and he saw once more the awful syllables that had blighted his life. No judge could ever pronounce a sentence

that would not be less terrible than was the one that exiled him from hope and home. Now his pride and sense of innocence were his only friends—they should still be his only friends, and she who had robbed him of hope should not now bid him throw away his pride. If the visit of Aunt Lylie should mean that Dora meant him any service, he would not accept it, it had come too late. The heart of Lawrance grew hot with the most intense resentment that it had ever cherished towards Dora. The prison-bars, the humiliation, the friendlessness—all served to give emphasis to memories that would not die. He saw her white hand on the prison-bolt and felt she had thrust him in there. His strength rallied as he kindled the fires of resentment on the altar of his love, those hottest, fiercest fires kindled out of the fuel of things most sacred. They make men strong, but with a terrible, cruel strength.

Night came draped in clouds, and with a low rumble of thunder coming now and then out of the west one of

those nights that thrust their gloom into the very marrow and lay chill hands of dread on the soul.

Ben had come to see his mother, and had brought other information. He had found out the charge on which Lawrance had been arrested, and that he was likely to be held there for a day or two and perhaps more before he was sent to Vandalia. Capt. Melton was out of the city.

Dora threw her cloak about her and taking Ben with her went out into the night. Was it safe? She did not know. Was this step womanly? She did not ask. She had reached that stage where a true woman remembers one thing and one only. She did not count the cost, she was resolved to act regardless of cost. Lawrance must be freed, and then—whatever came. To that point all the woman's soul of her gathered itself up and hastened, not heeding what lay between; beyond it her heart forbade her to look lest the beauty of the deed be marred.

Guided by Ben she went straight to the prison. The place was anything

but inviting even to stouter nerves than Dora's. It was a dingy, grimy, two-story stone building with police office below and prison-cells above. They were hard, stern, unsympathetic faces that confronted her. The narrow office was lighted by a single jet, that shot its yellow arrows into a dense cloud of tobacco smoke. Dora's cause gave her courage, and she went bravely in, clutching under her cloak the weapon with which she was to fight for the freedom of Lawrance—the confession of "Shocky."

"How, what have we here, my lass? Rather an unseasonable hour for such as you. What can we do for you?" This was her greeting by a burly policeman, as he rested one hand on the butt of his pistol and with the other twirled a stout club. There was something in the voice painfully unlike the voices she had been used to, and the sight of half a dozen others of the same general pattern lounging and smoking on the inside was not reassuring. At the sound of her voice, they all became instantly attentive, as

if alert for the latest sensation. Dora mastered her timidity, and spoke firmly:

"You have a prisoner here by the name of Kenyon, have you not?"

"Kenyon? When did he come in?"

He was answered from within:

"That's the chap I pulled this morning, Chief."

"Oh, yes. Well, what of him?"

"I wish to speak to him," said Dora.

"That is impossible. He has been locked up, and it is too late for visitors."

"But I must see him. Only for a minute, just to speak a word to him. I know he is innocent, I have the proof, and I must tell him. Fancy what it means, what it would mean to you, to be locked up like that when you were innocent, and no word from—from any one." She spoke earnestly and rapidly, and at the last her voice broke, and her eyes were brilliant and eloquent with tears.

The voice that replied was less harsh now, "I am sorry, Miss, but it is

against the rules for visitors to see prisoners at this hour, and we can not make exceptions."

"But," said Dora, "here are proofs of his innocence. It is the confession of the guilty man. When you see it you will let him go?" This last as an eager question, producing the precious document as she finished.

"I would be glad to accommodate you, ma'am, but it is impossible. All the proofs in the world are of no use here. You will have a chance to produce them at the proper time," and he turned away to indicate that there was nothing further to be said.

Dora hesitated. How helpless she felt in the presence of that great power called law, sometimes also called justice, which seemed to her now a monster deaf to pleading and blind to tears. She thought of a message to Lawrance, a message that would have sweetened all the bitterness of his heart and turned that prison into a palace, but that message refused to blossom in that atmosphere, and with sinking heart she turned

sadly away; and Lawrance brooded in the darkness, all ignorant of the happiness so near to him—happiness for him, if he had known it, in the very wretchedness of Dora.

Then a thought came to Dora that brightened her face. There was a chance yet. How hearts defy distance! And that there is anywhere in the wide earth one, just one, soul that will always lower its scepter at our coming, how it cheers and strengthens! Dora knew the electricity of the clouds yonder did not leap to meet the electricity of the earth more surely or readily than the strength of her father would leap to gird her weakness, and the thought soothed her as the embrace of his arms had often done for the motherless girl. She hurried to the telegraph-office not far away and sent the following message to him:

“Lawrance arrested here for burning store. Have him released. I have proof of his innocence. DORA.”

It had begun to rain. The clouds hung low. The streets were silent and the street-lamps flickered with a sickly glow where they chanced to be. To-

night there was much darkness between them, and the way for Dora and Ben was along the river, which sang a dull minor over the shallows in full harmony with the dismal heavens above and the depressed spirits within. At one point a sudden turn brought them close to the riverbank, under the dark, dripping trees. Dora was listening to their footfalls, which seemed startlingly loud in the silence, when suddenly two men stepped into the path in front of them. Their outlines could barely be seen as they planted themselves across the path. Dora and Ben stopped. When the two men started to advance Ben's courage, not the most virile at the best, forsook him utterly and he took to his heels. This brought Dora to herself, and in a voice of command and rebuke, she simply said, "Ben!" It had the desired effect. Ben retraced his steps. The voice of Dora had rallied his courage or else her authority had mastered his fears. The unknown men were only two paces in advance, completely barring the way. One of

them spoke in an easy, almost polite voice:

"Make no noise, Miss, and you shall suffer no harm. We only want those papers you have about you. Be so kind as to hand me those and you may pass on."

Dora thought with the rapidity of lightning. These men must know the value of these papers and that she had them. She thought of some ugly faces she had seen at the police station. They were, then, enemies of Lawrance. His safety was at stake. She must defend those papers, even with her life. Yet how? She could not flee, she was at the mercy of these men. Could she commit the precious package to the darkness?

In a firm tone she said, "Let me pass. I will give you my life sooner than these papers." So saying, she made a movement forward. One of the men sprang at her, but was met by the fist of Ben, which laid him his length on the ground. Then she saw Ben felled by a club in the hands of the other. She must act quickly. She

grasped the package of papers, and flung them out into the darkness. To her amazement she saw the white leaves uncurl on the bosom of the river, touched at that point by the light of a distant street-lamp, and the careless waters laughed and gamboled as they bore away what was to her more precious than life itself. The highwayman sprang towards her at the moment she threw the paper, but he never reached her, for swift and terrible came a blow from some unseen hand in his rear that laid him sprawling on the earth. Then before she knew what was happening, she was caught by a strong pair of arms, lifted from her feet and carried away, she knew not whither, as if she had been a child. She had not fainted nor cried out during all the excitement, nor did she do either now, but she was powerless in the giant grasp to do anything but let herself be borne along, bewildered, overcome by the excitement through which she had just passed and was passing. She hadn't time for much reflection, till

there came a voice from that monster with the iron grip saying, "Don't be oneasy, Miss, we'll have you home in a minute." This was all, till she was put gently down at her uncle's door, and the voice said again, "I hope yer not shuck up ter hurt," and before she could answer or breathe her thanks, the darkness had swallowed him.

She lost no time in looking after Ben, who, when help reached him, was alone, the two highwaymen having managed to take themselves away. Ben was recovering consciousness. He was bleeding freely from a wound in the head but proved not to be seriously hurt.

Dora, delivered from the strange whirlwind of events in which all thinking had been swallowed up, began to cast about to see if she might decide what was to be done next.

It was a gray morning that broke on the sleepless eyes looking out of her window, and the clouds that rolled in huge masses across the sky enveloping and enfolding each other were fit

symbols of her mental condition. She paced the room in the early light and tried to compose her spirits. While thus absorbed, there came a sudden gleam of light, and looking up she saw the city was bathed in the glory of the rising sun, that had ploughed a huge breach in the clouds, set all the spires agleam and turned the growth along the river into an orchard of diamonds. As suddenly something within her that the clouds and darkness had quenched was touched into life by that light. Though she did not see the way, in some vague yet beautiful sense she felt there was a way and that she was equal to finding it.

While her nature in the morning light was getting its slack forces into place as a bow is bent to the string, she heard the door-bell ring. Listening, she heard her own name called. Who could it be? Perhaps a message from Lawrance. Soon she was summoned to greet a strange man, who made a too evident and therefore

awkward effort to hide that ill-used, shrinking manner that crime and misery beget. After her kind greeting, he began in a hesitating drawl:

"I come to see you, Miss, not that the like o' me is fit to look at the like o' you, but because I knowed things you didn't, and can help you. Ef I'd a' wanted to hurt you, I could a' done it las' night when I brung you home. But it makes me happy to do for you, 'cause you've been good to my Chris what I left like a dog. I furgot you don't know I am Chris's pa, an' it ain't fur him to be proud uv."

Dora could contain herself no longer, and she exclaimed, "You the father of Chris, and you here, and it was you who defended me, and brought me home last night! Do let me thank you—"

"Don't mind, Miss; it's all on account o' Chris, an' 'cause you bin good to him, an' Mr. Kenyon an' his good word to me. It's not many good turns I've done in my time, an' it makes a body feel more like 'e's some

account to lend a hand for them as deserves it. It's not a long story, nor one 'at a feller can brag about, but I'll make it as cler as I can.

"You see, I was wuthless, an' all fum drink, an' I fell into ways as wus bad, *bad*. Then I had to hide out, an' with two other men I come here, after goin' down to Mexico. One of the three was the man that burnt the store. He give a man them papers you had last night. He wanted to git rid o' that showin' o' his guilt, an' also to git Mr. Kenyon convicted, for he was to git a part o' the reward. He was at the station las' night, an' heard you say you had 'em, though how you come by 'em I can't make out. He then follered on with 'is pal to waylay you an' git 'em from you. I've quit 'em, all along o' Mr. Kenyon givin' us a talk one night. I was at the station an' watched 'em. I knowed they meant mischief, you see I know that sort, an' I follered. My jedgment was right, an' I got there jest in time ter help you out, though you

shorely was stan'in' yer groun' plucky fur a' 'oman.

"I come ter say 'bout Mr. Kenyon, don't you be no ways oneasy. I knows all erbout that bizness, an' I'm er goin' to see 'im through. They ain't nary hair o' his head in no danger. I ain't hankerin' after no court, fur I've got reasons to fight shy uv all sich, but ef Mr. Kenyon has ter go thar, here's one as is goin' too, an' tell what I know ef I hang fur it—which I don't think, min' you, he'll ever have to go. An' I wanted you to know you could count on me in this 'ere bizness for all I'm wuth, an' that ain't much."

While he was speaking, a telegram was put into Dora's hands which was opened with trembling fingers. It read:

"All right. No cause for arrest. Will be ordered released at once. FATHER."

"Jes' as I 'lowed it 'ud be," said the visitor when it was read, and his face showed only a little less satisfaction than Dora's.

It was genuine delicacy and insight that prompted Dora to ask this man to carry the dispatch with her compliments to Mr. Kenyon, and his soul was in the alacrity with which he accepted the task.

CHAPTER XXVI.

A MEETING AND A PARTING.

Lawrance found himself at liberty and back in his room at the noon hour. There were things for him to think over. None so absorbing as the fact that evidently, whether he was willing or not, Dora had played an important part in securing his release, except that other question of what he was to do about it, now he was out of prison. He did not know the motive that lay back of her acts, nor what they might mean to him. She dared not let him know. To her he was the lover who had left her without a word of explanation. To him she was the woman who had cruelly flung him from her, and he felt now he could not forget and meet her as a friend simply. He felt it would be discourteous not to in some way recognize her kindness. He went through the form of writing a formal

note of thanks, but he was half conscious all the time it was being written that he would not send it. When he finished he was thoroughly certain it would be acting a stupendous falsehood to send that, and he tore it to shreds. Then he wrote a polite request for the privilege of calling to express his thanks in person. But when he thought of her coming to the prison and encountering those ruffians, and for him, he called himself names not at all complimentary for resorting to that formality, and did the manly, sensible thing—went straight to Capt. Melton's and called for Dora. For the rest no pen is adequate.

Happy souls, we leave you to your bliss! We can trust the hand of love to tear away the veil that has hung between you. Distance, that friend of delusion and deception, no longer divides you, and the voice of love will break the long silence and lay the ghosts of suspicion. We only know that falsehood can not live, nor doubt haunt the heart, when two who love are face to face. Further we have no

care to inquire. How many strange things of the past few months will be made plain in the white light of that holy confidence, and what tides of rapture shall roll over the desert sands as heart speaks to heart! We bid you welcome to love's Elysium; you deserve it, as those whose hearts are true deserve it always.

* * * * *

It was growing late in the day when Lawrance rose to go. The sun was descending the cloud-flecked west, and a holy peace was over the earth. Aunt Lylie had asked to see the lovers before they parted. This privilege was willingly granted her, for they felt how much they owed to her fidelity, and also it had been made clear that she was near the end. The forces of her life had spent themselves, and the restless energies were slowing up. It began to be evident that her prophecy was true that her work was done. Noble work it had been, though done by an humble soul. Her mind was clear, only when she slept

there were broken sentences that showed she was moving in the realm of shadows. "I's gittin' monst'ous ti'd, but den 'tain't but er leetle funder. I kin see de house an' de big beech an' ole mistiss waitin' fur me on de big po'ch." Then she waved her hand as if answering a signal. Sometimes she sang a simple lullaby, accompanied by a swaying motion of the head and arms, then patting the cover, she would say, "Dar now, leetle Dodie ain' gwine' cry no mo; kase black mammy dun an' sung 'er ter sleep." She was back in the childhood of Dora. Once more recent memories wove themselves into her dreams, and she murmured, "Lylie hears yer callin', Mistiss, an' she comin' now, kase she done foun' 'im, and' de li'l lam' kin git 'long 'dout me now."

Lawrance tried to thank her for the part she had taken in bringing them together, but she simply said, "It's de Lawd's doin's. I bin prayin' fur ter fin' yer. When dey told me yer wuz dead an' dey done foun' yo' grabe, I

mos' gin up, but I ain' quite, kase somp'in' tol' me we gwin' fin' yer."

"Do you think the Lord had something to do with all this?" This question was no idle one. Lawrance was attracted and impressed by the simple faith of this ignorant, wise soul, and he had sighted the headlands of faith under the storm-rent skies of the last few days. Dora looked at him with the first pained, hurt expression he had ever seen on her face, but she was silent.

"Law, chil', I knows it. How come we heah dis mawnin' ef 'e ain' lead us? Dis is er big worl', an' we bin fur 'part an' now we heah in dis little room. Ain' somebody brung us heah?"

"Aunt Lylie, I have sometimes thought He did not care; else He would not let His children suffer as Dora and you and I have suffered."

"Dat's whut I can' zac'ly mek out myse'f; but I know dis, yo' burden don' git no lighter when you' don' trus' an' pray; hit git heavier; but when you pray, it seem lak er han'

cum down an' he'ps you tote de load. I don't know but whut hit 'pears ter me trouble's ez much de sign er His love ez de glad is, kase he's tryin' ter sabe us. Ben use ter git er splinter in 'is foot an cum cryin' to 'is mammy. Den I'd set 'im on my lap an' take er needle an' git it out. He might beg me dat I won' hu't him. But hit gwine ter hu't wuss fur dat splinter ter stay dar dan hit hu't ter git it out. I ain' axin' how come it in, but I axin' how I kin git it out. I don' know how 'tis, but I spec' de Lawd hab ter do his chillun dat a way."

"Aunt Lylie, I want to believe as you believe, and as Dora believes," said Lawrance, "for it makes life beautiful and the heart glâd, and I am going to try."

"Mars Lawrance, I dun an' prayed fur you day an' night. Now I gwine leab Dodie wid you, de chile whut I nuss an' keer fur so long. She ain' got no mudder, an' she won' hab ole black Mammy no longer. Ole Mistiss waitin' fur 'er up yander an' I's gwine ter be waitin' fur 'er, an' we

spec'in' you ter he'p 'er an' come wid 'er. I promus Ole Mistiss I gwine stay wid 'er an' do my bes' fur 'er twell she don' need me no mo'. Now dat time's done come, an' I gwine to leab you an' her in de han's er de One whut sabel Ole Mistiss an' sabel Ole Lylie dis minnit." She took Dora's hand in one of hers and Lawrance's in the other, as they stood on opposite sides of the bed with bowed heads. Involuntarily they obeyed her unexpressed desire and knelt, and she prayed with voice sinking lower and lower: "O Lawd, take dese chillun by dey han' an' lead 'em same ez you led Ole Marster an' Mistiss. De paf been mighty rough an' dark, but now hit's come smooov, an' de light's done bruk fur 'em. Keep 'em—side an' side—in de narrer paf—" here the voice sank to a whisper, "an' bring 'em safe—" it was the end. The last breath had spent itself in prayer, a prayer as sacred and acceptable as ever ascended from splendid cathedral altar, and one that will be remembered in Heaven

when the stately pleadings of a thousand sacerdotal lips are forgotten.

Just then the sunshine broke through a cloud and, stealing through the window lattice, fell across all three. When the two arose from their knees, Aunt Lylie's bosom was still. Lawrance looked at Dora with a new tenderness, a new, deep joy. The light had entered his soul, for he had looked toward the Son of Righteousness.

Here we bid farewell to as true, pure, and heroic a soul as ever dwelt in human clay—God's image in black, as in those two at her side He is seeking to repeat His image in white.

Lawrance came from the death-bed of Aunt Lylie a changed man. The great deeps of his nature had been stirred by the events of the past few days. He had been drifted beyond the cold and cheerless regions of speculation by currents of emotion that scarcely left time or space for the rudder of his own choice. At the last scene of that strangely simple yet wondrously wise life, ebbing out

into the light, he had yielded himself to the divine will and once again there was joy in Heaven. He walked homeward feeling as one who has been long struggling through a wilderness, pathless and wild, going he knew not whither, but has at last emerged into the open, and sees the plain highway lead between green fields and sunny meadows, all sweet with the breath of springtime. The clouds had lifted; there was peace. He had come at once to the end of his wandering and the end of his doubting.

Between the joy of his old love requited and of his new love just found he could easily distinguish. One was the best earth had to offer, the other a taste of the best Heaven has to bestow. Till now the love of Dora never held its rightful place in his heart. It was divested of idolatry, for it was now subordinate to a higher love. It was none the less tender, none the less dominant among human loves, but it was truer, more divine, and gave more real joy because it held its rightful place in a heart that

had found a higher anchorage. His human love and its object were lifted to a higher plane and transfigured in the new light into a beauty to which they were before strangers. The whole of life, its joy and sorrow, assumed a new beauty under the glow of this splendid dawn.. He had not only found Dora, but the world, himself, and God. Henceforth the way was clear.

He was walking by the river-side, the swish of its waters was in his ears; he was watching the sway of the long grass that grew beneath the surface, and the glad rhythm of its seaward flow was appealing to his eye and ear. Just overhead a mocking-bird sang from the boughs of a pecan-tree ravishing snatches that leapt from song to song, as if the singer were trying all the songs he knew to find one that would fit the mood of the hour, and the last seeming ever sweeter than the rest—a ladder of song on which the soul might climb far into the heights of rapture. Lawrance was in a mood to enjoy the scene to the full, for once

more his heart was open to nature's secrets, and more so than ever to her highest secrets, and he was happy.

Hearing a stealthy footstep behind him Lawrance turned and was face to face with Chris Ware. Extending his hand he said, "Come with me, my friend," and his voice and his manner spoke more than his words.

The proffered hand was let fall by the two rough hands that seized it, and taking a step backward, the man stood a moment before speaking, then shaking his head sadly he said, "Me? me? your friend? You didn't mean that."

"Why shouldn't I? You saved me from those ruffians at the risk of your life, and last night you saved—her, and you are my friend and her friend," Lawrance replied.

"Not yit, not—yit—" and the head shook slowly and mournfully and the words were like a sob. "Yer see, 'tain't no ways shore yit—I'm a-tryin,' but the devil's in here!" and he clutched and tore at his breast. "The drink, the drink, it's been like a fire in me all

night an' all day, an' I've tramped the streets with this ragin' hell in my breast. I know ther's a devil, but is ther a God, an' will 'e he'p? Ef I go down this time, it's no use, the jig's up. Sumpin' tole me jist now, 'Here's the river, jump in an' pass yer checks, fer it's no use tryin'; but when I seen you I run fum the river."

"Listen to me," said Lawrance, kindly laying his hand on Ware's shoulder. "There is a God and He will help His children. You are one of His blinded prodigal children, and I am your brother. As a proof that God will help, He has taught you to help and is teaching me to help. Come with me and we will learn together."

Ware drew back, and almost shook the hand from his shoulder. "No, I can't. I must clear out. I am hungry. I can't git no work. Who'd ye 'spect to trust me? Ef I could only git work, I mought stick."

Then Lawrance looked at his face and saw it was pale and sunken, and it dawned on him that the struggle was not only with the devil of thirst

but also of hunger. Then the tragedy of this unequal fight for manhood, this almost hopeless clutching for a footing on the steps that lift themselves into the eternal sunshine, presented itself before his mind, and this man, who had waged his struggle in the dark without sympathy or bread, with all the habits of a lifetime tugging at him, and all the world putting out its hands to push him down, was transformed into a hero. But he also knew there is an end to human endurance, and this man had but now reached it, and put out his hand for that touch of human sympathy that would rally his courage. The heart of Lawrance went out to him and he felt as if he were laying hold on a soul just slipping into hell. The hand he laid on the man now was one of authority, and the voice had in it tenderness but also command as he said, "Come." And that baffled soul seized its footing on the upward slope; and as they walked away there were three, and the third was whispering, "Lo, I am with you."

CHAPTER XXVII.

A MERRY CHRISTMAS AND HOME AGAIN.

The holidays were at hand. The north wind rather rudely caressed the roses that had dared the domain of winter, swept the pecans from the trees, spread a covering of leaves over the shivering earth, and set the evening fires hissing and glowing with their message of cheer. The color was coming to Dora's cheek, the light to her eye. There is that which is more than climate, more than physic; which can set all the wheels of life awhirl and make the pulse bound with new energy. It can change the snows of Lapland to blooming gardens and transform the leaden gloom of winter to tropic springtime. That something had come to Dora.

Cousin Jack gladdened them all with a promised visit. Dora and Lawrance were constantly together,

and Amelia was left almost entirely to Jack's attentions—thrown on his mercy, as she expressed it. A very tender mercy, we are about to suspect.

Lawrance could no longer withhold from Dora the secret of his book. Who was ever able to hide his ambitions from the one he loves? It is one of the noblest fruits of love that it furnishes an atmosphere in which ambitious dreams and half-formed Utopias ripen. The crude, unfinished poem, kept under lock and key from the indifferent eyes of the world, is brought out and read, not without sly apology and promise of improvement. Dreams that one has blushed even to entertain, and which have been put away a hundred times as a foolish fancy, are laid bare; and life plans, which in the world's atmosphere of cold criticism would split the sides of ridicule, deck themselves out in the garb of rhetorical exaggeration in the tempting sunshine of love. Well it is for him who can keep through the toiling years in the enchanting atmosphere that has the power to lure from

its cowering retreat the daring spirit of endeavor.

Toward the close of the holidays Amelia received the following letter:

DEAR AMELIA: Permit me to address you thus once more. I know I have forfeited that right, but it soothes the pain at my heart to speak to you as of old. As I think of that time, now forever gone with all but its memories, a flood of thoughts come over me, but of that I will not write. I have wronged you and others deeper than you know, and deeper than I realized until recently. Pride, avarice and ambition blinded my eyes to my own guilt. The discovery of it has come too late. All that is left me now is to seek forgiveness. I am sick—the physicians say hopelessly, and so I believe.

Could I see you once more and hear you say you forgive me, I could die content. If this is not to be, will you not at least try to think of me as I used to appear to you in those bright days before the shadows fell?

Farewell till we meet.

ROSWELL GRANTLEY.

Then Amelia was in haste to go. Unfathomable heart of woman! Her idol was shattered, and she no longer worshiped, but pity still reigned in her heart.

"The being she loved was no more.

What she saw in the silence and heard in the lone
Void of life, was the young hero born of her own
Perished youth."

There is a master to some natures stronger than love; its name is duty. Amelia's was one of those natures,

and when her sensitive conscience said she ought, though all the clamor of pride and passion and pleasure sought to drown its voice, her will responded unhesitatingly, "I must." This is the stuff of which martyrs and heroes are made, and all the world's uplift has come through the strength of such souls.

Poor Jack! It was a sad and lonely day for him when he went back to the ranch. Amelia had left him without one encouraging word. She had been kind, gentle, almost tender in her manner, but had forbidden him to hope. If Jack was pained at this parting, he was not alone in his suffering. Life has in it more tragedy than is written. If he made a forced sacrifice to Amelia's high sense of duty, she laid her own live, beating heart on the altar *willingly*. She had set her face towards a rare and beautiful sacrifice.

Thus, when the sun shines for some, the shadows fall on others. The extent of Amelia's sacrifice is beyond our power to know, as its nature and motive are beyond the com-

prehension of any whose lives are on a lower plane than hers. Her heart, all bruised and mangled as it was, had begun to heal in the atmosphere of Jack's genial, noble presence. She had known him only a few days when she was dismayed to find that what she had thought an impossibility was actually coming to pass. She had put far from her all thoughts of loving again. Her heart was dead within her. But it now began to live, and the thoughts and dreams of love began to come back as the nesting birds come back in the springtime. But she kept her secret subdued and hidden with higher thoughts. When that secret struggled to be free, and she yearned to give response to the love that plead for one little crumb of hope, she hushed its cry with another word, "duty." Thus, these two, the currents of whose lives had met and mingled, and whose hearts had leaped to each other as if all the past had meant them for each other, parted and went their ways.

Amelia hastened to the bed-side of Roswell. She found him indeed a wreck of his former self, with no hope of recovery, but at most only the prospect of lingering invalidism. She assured him of her complete forgiveness, cheered and comforted him as only she could do, and at once took her position as his good angel. She forbade him to speak of the painful things of the past, under penalty of her displeasure. She spent such part of every day by his side, reading and talking, as she could spare from her work, for she was compelled to teach for support.

We leave her there at her self-chosen post, in spite of her heart's human yearnings, and in spite of the tender, pleading letters from Jack, keeping steadily to the highway of duty as it appeared to her. Who shall blame her if her heart was often far away with the ranchman, and who shall think her the less a heroine that she was not able to smother the passion to which she refused to yield? Noble nature! Thy like is all too rare in this

beclouded earth, where unselfish deeds shine so bright and so far! Perhaps, some day, when thou art released from thy self-imposed watch by the side of him who caused thy deepest pain, Heaven will appoint thee thy place by the side of one who will bring joy to thee, thy greatest joy; who knows? Meantime, think well that in the crucifixion of thy own life thou art also devoting to a life of inconsolable loneliness another, and while bringing light and cheer to one, thou art drawing a cloud of gloom over the sky of another. Think well, and choose.

Mr. Melton welcomed both Dora and Lawrance with great joy. He gave them a father's blessing, and in their happiness this man of many years and many cares became happy himself, and, as he beheld their sweet contentment, was carried out of his perplexities back to the sunny years of his own youth, and love again sang its rapturous songs through his dreams.

The reader would not, and ought not, to forgive these lovers if they did not go out under the big beech and stand once more together on the spot where on that memorable first of May the secret broke into speech. Trust them to think of the propriety of that, or, rather, to do it, propriety or no propriety. Standing there, looking into each other's eyes, once again speech fails. In a delicious, eloquent, rapturous silence they give themselves to memories and hopes, or rather let us say to oblivion of all save each other.

"Dora!"

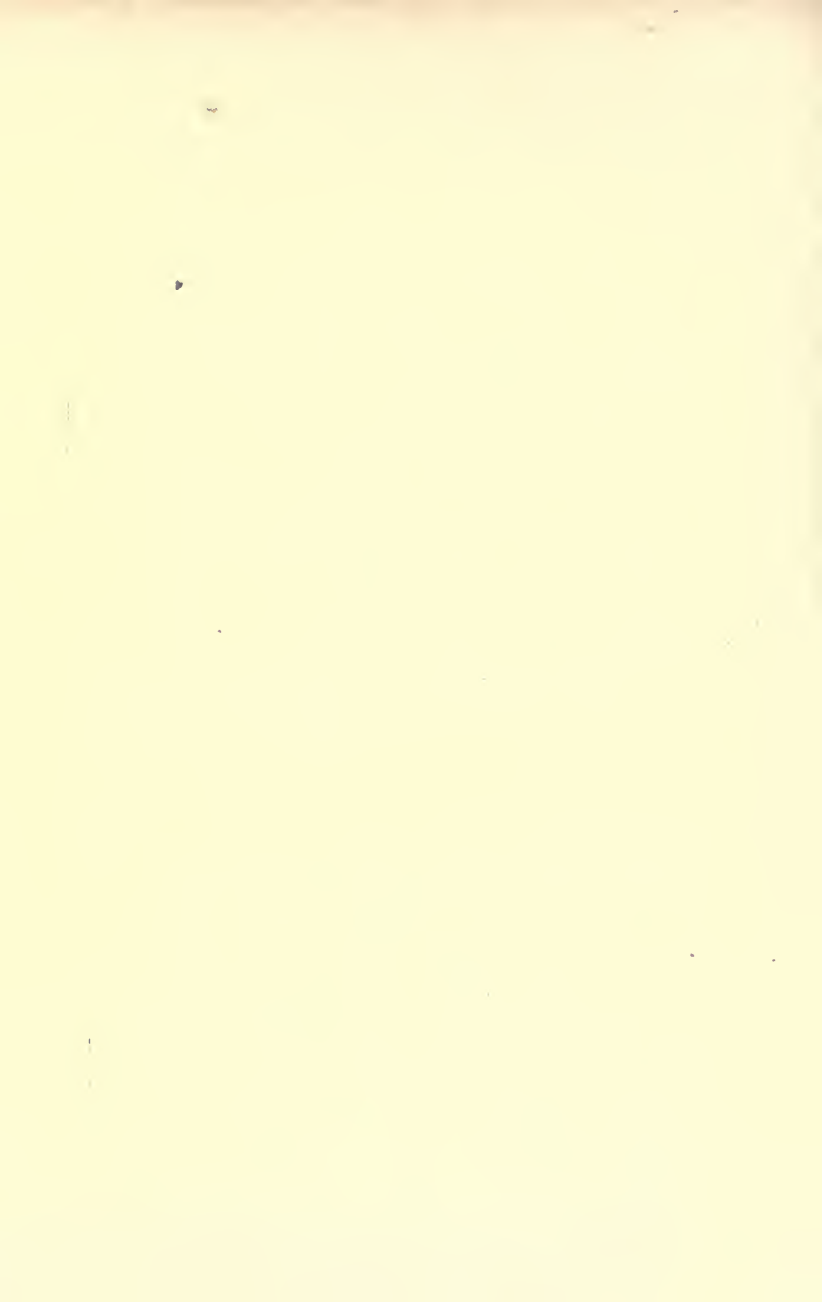
"Lawrancel!"

Reader, let us take a turn among these stately trees, and draw our wraps about us; for it is chilly for those who have nothing else to keep them warm save these woven rags, and let us not try to overhear or oversee these lovers. Let us together be glad that such a moment has ever been in our own lives, and pity the poor wretches who, beneath some beech, or beside some rosebush, or astroll

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on some moonlit lawn, have never
listened to their own hearts beat in
passionate syllables and heard the
echo from another heart, blissfully
conscious the while that no curious
eyes or ears were nigh.

THE END.









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